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AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

MIKHAIL NAIMY

SOME ASPECTS OF HIS THOUGHT AS REVEALED IN HIS WRITINGS

by

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INTRODUCTION

In more than one respect, Mikhail Naimy is a unique Arab writer: through his education in Russian schools both in the Lebanon and Palestine and later in Tzarist Russia, he became familiar with Russian literature, (very few contemporary Arab writers have had such a distinguishing feature), and he became familiar with Anglo-Saxon literature while living in the United States for over twenty years. Moreover, Naimy formulated his views on Western civilisation during his long stay in the States and not just by reading about it or living for a short period in a Western society as a young student. Born an Orthodox Christian, Mikhail Naimy's beliefs became unorthodox, for his interest in Buddhism, Hinduism, metempsychosis and Sufism so widened the horizons of his outlook that he almost evolved a "faith" of his own which embraced elements from all the great Faiths that humanity has known. Naimy is also distinguished from other Arab writers by his preoccupation with Man - Man's origin and destiny, his aims and his relations with the world around him - and by his denunciation of Western civilisation in a part of the world which is still dazzled by the achievements of that civilisation.

Needless to say, Naimy was one of the most influential pioneers who revolutionized the literary concepts of the Arabs at the beginning of this century. Important as this aspect of Naimy's career is, it should be pointed out that it is touched upon in this study only as far as it reveals the trend of his thought, which is the main subject of the work.

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H.M.A. Dabbagh

Chapter 1. HIS LIFE AND CHARACTER

Biskinta and Nazareth

> "I know what is happening today, and what
> passed before that yesterday,
> but as for knowing what tomorrow will bring,
> there I'm utterly blind."
>
> Zuhair b. Abī Salmā (One of
> the pre-Islamic poets of Al-Muʿallaqāt)

Mikhail Naimy was born in 1889 in Biskinta, a small village situated on Sannin (Ṣannīn), one of the highest mountains of the Lebanon. His father, a poor and hard working farmer, emigrated to the United States in the hope of providing a better life for his family, only to return after a few years just as poor as he had been. The family, consisting then of two elder brothers besides Mikhail, was looked after by a devoted mother, whose prayers for the success of her husband the little boy was asked to repeat before going to bed: "Say with me my boy: May God grant success to my father in America. May his touch turn sand in his hands into gold! May he return safe and sound to us . . ."(1)

The boy, seeing sand all around him, wondered why his father should travel all the way to America to turn its sand into gold. "Or is it that the sand of America is different from our own? Yes, it must be!"

The hardships of life in Biskinta must have added fervour to the mother's supplications. Its rugged land, stony tracks and hard winters made life a challenge for its inhabitants, who only took refuge in it to flee the tyranny of their rulers. They built their simple houses of small stones dipped in clay, and made their ceilings of tree trunks covered with timber and leaves. Water had to be carried in jars from a distant spring and a flickering gas lamp was their only source of light.

But, if the land was unyielding and the winters hard, Biskinta still had a good deal to offer: a healthy climate, forests of pine trees and deep valleys interspersed with patches

of arable land, where wheat and corn were grown, and there were trees and birds, rocks and mountains, all breeding a deep love for the village in the heart of the little Mikhail Naimy: "The sound of the swaying corn moved me in such a way as even the greatest orchestras could hardly hope to do to the soul of a great lover of music."

This great attachment to nature strikes one as a major factor in the moulding of Mikhail Naimy's character and personality. But it seems to have been a highly individualistic attachment which is difficult to express in words. In his auto-biography, he gives a detailed description of Biskinta and al-Shakhrub (al-Shahkrūb):

"For what avail is it to tell you that al-Shahkhrub is a small spot of land in the slope of Sannin which abounds with rocks, trees, thorns and birds, unless you lived as closely as I did to those rocks, trees, birds, unless you knew, as I did, that it throbs with life both day and night, unless you saw it, as I did, at the break of dawn, and in the flaming heat of noon, and just before sunset, and in the light of the stars and the moon?"

Sannin, Biskinta, al-Shahkhrub, nature and its adoration, came to be an integral part of Mikhail Naimy's personality and thoughts. After this detailed description of his surroundings, he addresses the reader in an apologetic tone:

"My only aim in giving a full description (of the environment) is to make it easier for you to accompany me on this journey, which is the journey of my life. For al-Shahkhrub is one of its most important milestones."

This attachment to nature was coupled with an attachment to his father, who, after returning from America "with a negligible amount of dollars", returned his hand to the plough. He was a man "of pure heart and good intention, innocent in soul and tongue," who seems to have found life in America too much of a burden for him to bear. Back in his village, he again tilled the land and, whenever he scattered the seeds, he would cross himself and murmur, "I sow, and you provide, O Lord!" Watching his

father, the little Mikhail was filled with fascination, for his father's face was then "the face of a worshipper whispering the most sacred and intimate of his prayers."

However, it was none other than a Giant Neighbour which was destined to change the course of the little boy's life in Biskinta: for the Russians, who patronized the Orthodox Christians of the Middle East, decided to open a school in this little village up in the mountains in the Lebanon and, in 1899, the school was founded. Instead of the traditional "Kuttāb", the village now had a school staffed by five male and three women teachers, and headed by a graduate of the Russian Teachers' Institute at Nazareth. The school taught Arabic and the rudiments of the Russian language, and the villagers took great pride in the new school and the great nation which had founded it. In the main hall the portraits of Tsar Nicholas II and his wife were displayed, and even the Maronites of the village were not ashamed of sending their childen to the Russian school. When a Russian inspector came to the village, there was great jubilation. An old shoe-maker ran after the mounted inspector shouting: "Are you the Muscovite? Long may you live."

Mikhail Naimy began at the school with enthusiasm: "For lessons and home-work, however excessive and complicated had never frightened me as they had the majority of my schoolmates. What helped me in learning was my natural inclination to learn." But he was also a quiet boy, inclined to keep to himself and shun the company of others:

"In fact I used to dislike noise, shouting and quarrelling. If I ever played, I would be completely absorbed, but only for a short time, after which I would leave the playground and make my way to an isolated spot near a stream or in the shade of a pine tree, where I would be preoccupied with watching a beetle rolling a ball of dung, or an ant dragging along a grain of wheat, or a bird looking for an insect, or a small clould sailing in the spacious blue sky above. I would draw lines or vague diagrams in the sand before me. Very often, in these moments of isolation, I would think that I was more than one person. Often I used to address those whom I imagined to be in my company, but without raising my voice."

Arabic was Mikhail Naimy's favourite subject. In an uncle's library, he avidly copied and learnt by heart expressions and phrases that appealed to him from Majmaʿ al-Baḥrain, (a collection of Maqāmāt written by al-Shaikh Nāṣīf al-Yāzijī, d. 1871), of which he made use at the age of eleven in a speech he gave in memory of a deceased relative.

After doing well in the elementary Russian school of Biskinta, Mikhail went to the Russian Teachers' Institute in Nazareth in 1902, where the best students in all the Russian schools of the Lebanon, Syria and Palestine were sent. Accompanied by his uncle, Mikhail bade farewell to his family and made his way to Beirut. There, for the first time, he found himself in a city with its narrow and dirty streets swarming with people, camels, donkeys, mules, dogs, and carts pulled by horses flogged by their drivers. The little boy would turn to see the turbanned heads and the veiled faces, and would say to himself:

"Those must be the Muslims. Did we not hear when we were young about the hatred of the Muslims for the Christians and that they would enjoy nothing better than to spill the blood of a Christian? But here they are not molesting us and we are Christians. We would also hear that the Jews would always kill a Christian boy at every Easter to redeem their sins with his blood. But where are the Jews in Beirut? And are there Jews and Muslims in Nazareth? Surely I am in a strange world! Where are you Biskinta, and where are you al-Shakhrub?"

The young boy boarded a little steamer which took him to Haifa, where he knew nobody. In the hustle and bustle of the port, the bewildered boy did not know what to do until a kind man approached him, asking where he wanted to go. Having told him that he wanted to go to Nazareth to join the Russian Teachers' Institute, he was taken by the man to his house where he was given a meal and got some rest, after which he was sent with a servant to the station where coaches left for Nazareth. But these and similar events in his life were looked upon later as more than merely fortuitous:

"This teacher who picked me to study in Nazareth, and those people who worked for the opening of the Russian school at Biskinta, this man from Haifa and others whom I will mention later - who employed them, to serve me? And who employs me to serve others? Is not there an unseen hand of which I am not aware and of which they are also ignorant? Do I not have a share, for myself and for them, in what that hand performs? And what is that share, and from whence?"

In Nazareth, Mikhail Naimy was taught Russian by a Russian teacher, but Arabic was not neglected. It was there that he learned the Alfīyah of Ibn Mālik(2) and the history of Arabic literature. Half a century later, we find him expressing his regret that the new generations of Arabs are not familiar with the Alfīyah. It is of significance that a young Christian Arab should learn by heart the line in the Alfīyah which states:

"Muṣalliyan ʿalā ʾl-rasūli ʾl-muṣṭafā wa-ālihi
ʾl-mustakmilīna ʾl-shurafā"
"Blessing the Messenger, The Chosen One, and his household, the perfect, the honourable"

which perhaps indicates that the Islamic element is essential in moulding the personality of an Arab, whether he be a Muslim or not. But if the Alfīyah was one of the first links between a Muslim scholar and the young Mikhail Naimy, Nazareth, on the other hand, only served to enhance his Christian feeling:

"For you are here - and everywhere else in Palestine - in a world of enchantment and blessing. Wherever you walk, wherever you look, there will spring for you out of the ancient past the phantoms of innumerable faces and events. All of these go deep into you, and the most loved among these is the face of the Master and the events of his life. What a short life that was! But how incapable Time is of folding it away and covering it with oblivion! Never forget, Mikhail, that you are here in the presence of Christ !"

With these words young Mikhail used to address himself, and

the profound religious feeling which he carried with him from Sannin deepened in Nazareth.

"How often I found myself, while on some picnic, withdrawing from myself and from my companions, imagining Christ and his disciples walking along the road we were walking along. Or I would imagine Him sitting alone in a state of spiritual ecstasy under that tree or by that rock."

In Nazareth, he believed the way the Church and the school wanted him to believe about how God created the world, Adam and Eve, and how Eve tempted Adam to eat of the forbidden tree and how thus Original Sin and Death came to be; how God sent from Heaven his only begotten Son, born of a virgin, so that he would redeem the people with His precious blood; whoever believed in Him would attain everlasting life after death; whoever disbelieved would have the Fire for his abode in Eternity.

Thus young Mikhail Naimy believed in Christ as the Guide and the Redeemer. Finding himself in the land where Christ was born, lived, taught and suffered, he took it upon himself to visit every place that had anything to do with the life of Christ as related in the Bible. Although he had his doubts about what was said regarding this place or that, he states: "I have never doubted the truth concerning the miracles ascribed to Christ."

On a picnic to Jabal al-Ṭūr (The Mount of Ascension), where Christ is said to have appeared in a halo of light, he spent a night with the vision of Christ shrouded in light never departing from his heart or eyes. More than once he would leave his friends behind, walking along that mountain, imagining that the gulf of time separating him from Christ had been filled: "For he was not far from me, nor was I a stranger to Him. It is a feeling that admits of no definition or analysis." To him the Sermon on the Mount was, and still is, "one of the noblest homilies ever uttered."

Mikhail Naimy's life in Nazareth would appear to be of immense importance as it confirmed the Christian element in his personality, which, although he was later influenced by other philosophies and attitudes to life, remained the corner-stone of his character and philosophy. Moreover, it was in Nazareth that

he became familiar with Russian literature. Although he admits that he did not understand half of what he read of Crime and Punishment at the time, it was enough to kindle in him a yearning to master the Russian language and its literature. It was also in Nazareth that his ideas about poetry started to take shape. Abū al-Alā' al-Ma'arrī, the famous Arab poet, philosopher and man of letters, (973-1075 AD), who expressed his pessimistic outlook on life in his philosophical poetry, seems to have been his favourite Arab poet. Naimy was immensely impressed with his Qasīdah which begins:

> "ghaira mujdin fī millatī wa-i'tiqādī // nauhu bākin wa-lā tarannumu shādī" (Of no avail, in my faith and belief, is the wailing of the mourner, nor the chanting of the singer).

It was this kind of poetry, which attempted to fathom the meaning of life, that moved him most and perhaps remained the foundation of every qaṣīdah he himself wrote later. He never cared for eulogy or anything which abounded in pomposity and exaggeration. This is not surprising for so sensitive a youth, whose Christian beliefs rebelled against poems that described "the sword that cured the heads of those who complained of headaches", (al-Mutanabbī 915-965 AD, who is considered by most Arab critics as the greatest Arab poet ever known).

Mikhail Naimy's inclination toward solitude is also noticeable during his stay in the Nazareth school; a friend censured him for something which he had never said, which made him decide to keep silent for ten days, after which he felt as if he had returned from a very distant journey:

"For, in this period in which I abstained from talking, my imagination was enriched and my mind acquired a vision other than the vision of the eyes. After that I began to feel that, although I was outwardly in harmony with my environment, there existed in me that which will always make me a stranger to it. This feeling of strangeness increased with the years until I came to live in two worlds; a world which I created for myself, and the world which other men have created for themselves. The two

worlds lived side by side within me but they never united."

His awareness of being a Christian was also emphasized while in Nazareth; Russian pilgrims used to come to the city for their pilgrimage, and he and his colleagues felt the strong link between themselves and the Orthodox Russians: "We were proud that they belonged to the same church as we did, and that there were millions of them in their country. So we were not a minority in the world, we thought to ourselves. We carried our own weight in this world and the Hereafter." But his consciousness of being a Christian did not seem to arouse in him the feeling that Christianity alone was right and that other beliefs were wrong. Talking of Paradise, of which the clergy preached, he even at that age thought that it was not a monopoly for the followers of one faith, for it could embrace those who were good, whatever faith they belonged to, and that Hell, with which they threatened the bad, would also take the bad who belonged to any faith: "So why all this quarrelling? Why precipitate Doomsday to throw people into Hell before they have spent their lives in this world, and before the Trumpet has blown?"

In Russia

In 1906, the Russian Teachers' Institute of Nazareth decided that Mikhail Naimy should be given the chance to go to Russia for higher education. That year, he found himself in Poltava in the Ukraine, joining its Theological Seminary which was in reality, no more than a secondary school with a six-year programme: the first four devoted to lay studies and some theology, and the last two devoted entirely to ecclesiastical studies.

From the very beginning, the young Arab student from Biskinta decided to conform with the Russians in every respect. He intended to speak their language they way they spoke it, to adopt their manners and traditions, and sing their songs and dance their dances, but always he yearned to return to Biskinta and Sannin one day. Poltava, however, was his window on a new world; his friends knew poems by the great Russian poets by heart, and he wanted to learn more than they did. He even aspired to write poetry, short stories, plays, and to learn how

to act, especially after he had been to the theatre for the first time in his life. It was there, too, that he had his first opportunity to attend opera and ballet, and to observe the freedom which both sexes enjoyed. In that Ukrainian town, the young Naimy began to compare the life that people lived in the outside world with that lived by people in his own country: "Impressed with the wealth of the life of the mind, the heart and the body, I came to realise the ugliness of the plight suffered by my country."

Mikhail Naimy's diaries in Poltava are revealing as they reflect the early impact which his life in Russia had upon him. The very idea of writing his diaries occurred to him after reading diaries of Nikitin, a Russian poet who was himself a Seminarian, and who wrote a book entitled The Diaries of a Seminarist. From Naimy's diaries we learn that he read Lermontov, a Russian poet who excelled in describing the beauties of the Caucasian mountains, but his thoughts, when reading such poems, would turn to the Lebanon: "If I were a poet, I would have chanted your beauties, Lebanon, you the cradle of my youth and the focus of my thoughts:

> "Yes, I would have sung of your hoary peaks and enchanting depths
> Where I have home and kinsmen
> and where the cedar trees tell the story of the past,
> Where streams of silver flow
> and life in its simplicity is a blessing
> Where Man's hand has not mutilated beauty."

These lines were written in verse and constituted his first attempt at writing poetry in Russian.

Reading Lermontov overwhelmed him with the desire to write poetry, as he says: "I will go along the path which my soul calls me to take. I will tread the path which has always tempted me since my early youth. It is the path of literature, and I am dedicated to it." It was not long before he had written a poem in Russian entitled "The Burial of Love", which received the admiration of his friends. "It was not a bad poem" he thought to

himself. Not quite satisfied with the poem, he sought a wider, deeper and a more worthy theme on which he would fully express his thoughts.

Mikhail Naimy's views on being a Christian took a new turn while in Poltava. The Nazareth boy, who had accepted literally what the school and the church wanted him to believe, began to think for himself. Attending church services came to be a matter of no importance to him: "True Christianity is not fulfilled by standing in the church for two or three hours on Sundays, Saturdays and holidays, but by applying the teachings of the Bible and its injunctions." You could not help, he thought, comparing the church with the theatre. For, in the church as in the theatre, you have no more than actors who have learnt their parts and played them well. The only difference perhaps is that the actors on the stage address their words to the spectators, while the clergy turn their faces to the Higher Being to utter words with their lips and not with their hearts. Their minds are not in communion with Him. Such thoughts led him to prefer saying his prayers alone and in isolation, and to say them in his own tongue and not in company with the clergy. This intellectual independence which led him to think out for himself what he had been taught about Christianity is reflected again in his tendency to reconsider for himself the ideas and the thoughts of the great Russian writers: after reading Tolstoy's War and Peace, he found himself in agreement with the writers's views on Napoleon, whom Tolstoy regarded as the product of historical events. If this was the case, Mikhail Naimy thought the same thing should be said about Kutuzov, Napoleon's Russian opponent. That Tolstoy should ascribe Kutuzov's victory against Napoleon to his wisdom, experience and will, and not to historical events, seemed contradictory to him. If it sounds presumptuous on the part of the young Mikhail Naimy to criticize such a towering literary figure as Tolstoy, he himself admitted as much:

"It is ludicrous that I should dare to criticize such a great thinker as Tolstoy . . .Do forgive me Leon Nicholaievich, for I am indebted to you for so many thoughts which fillwed with light the darkness of my spirit. Your recent works which I read last year were a great source of inspiration which illumined my

life. Indeed, you have come to be my teacher and guide, a fact of which you are unaware."

The more Mikhail Naimy immersed himself in Russian literature, the more he thought about modern Arabic literature. He could not help comparing the vitality and vigour of the former with the stagnation of the latter. When he received a few issues of al-Hilāl, to which he subscribed in order to keep in contact with the Arab world, he wrote in his diaries: "We still have no literature worthy of the name. There is nothing in our literary production which could be described as genuine literature." One should bear in mind that this was the period when Jurjī Zaidān and Manfalūtī were the most prominent writers in the Arab world. No words give a more succinct description of the literary merits of these two writers than those of Sir Hamilton Gibb: (3)

"Zaidān's writing was too colourless and didactic, and Manfalūtī was too superficial in thought and too strongly inclined to the classical tradition in style, to attract readers who sought in Arabic literature something comparable to the books with which they were familiar in the languages of the West."

The seeds of Naimy's rebellion against the stagnant Arabic literature of the day were being sown: a rebellion which later manifested itself in his writings.

Much as Mikhail Naimy was interested in Russian literature, he was equally keen to live with the Russians and to become familiar with their family and social life. A friend of his, by the name of Alyosha, invited him to spend the summer of 1908 with his family in a small Ukrainian village. There, he came to know several young girls, but he

"never surrendered to the temptations of any of them. If I had wanted to play the part of Don Juan, I would have been able to do so quite easily. But there is something in my nature which rebels against the likes of Don Juan, and those who play frivolously with women's emotions for the sake of satisfying a passing desire."

This earnestness in his character is revealed in his inclination to avoid noisy gatherings and parties. Aloysha persuaded him one evening to accompany him to a party, after which they returned home at dawn, meeting on their way groups of farmers heading for work. "There we are" Mikhail Naimy thought to himself, "spending our night in shameless buffoonery while they walk steadily to their work with the hope of the new day glittering in their eyes, and in their hands lie the keys to the blessings of life. What irritates you is that they greet you as if you are the one who deserves the blessings, while they are the sycophants. . ."

Varya, Alyosha's sister, who was married to a dull-witted man, found herself in love with Mikhail who was at a loss to find a way out of this problem. He decided to leave the village, and so he made his way to Poltava. Back in the Seminary, he indulged in a fit of abstemiousness; he shaved once or twice a week and hardly went to the theatre. He no longer frequented the nearby convent's forest, nor did he attend dancing parties. He even shunned casual chattering with friends. Once again he took refuge in silence and isolation:

"For in isolation you have the opportunity of coming closer to your inner soul, searching for the good and the bad seeds that lie in it. It is in such a state that you have the opportunity to examine your conscience, and to decide what course you want it to take."

The party night with Alyosha and the love affair with Varya seem to have intensified his innate disposition for meditation: "I am now searching for something important, distant and vague. Everything else seems to me to be trivial." Reading and writing became his only consolations, but these preoccupations served merely to provide an outlet for his feelings without providing answers for the questions that harassed his mind. Even a simple matter like strolling down a street brought with it a host of questions:

"For why should this army officer walk so proudly down the street as if God himself owes him a debt? Is it the sword on his side or the resonance of his spurs that fill him with his vain

pride? What service does he, I wonder render to this world? Surely his job is nothing more than learning and teaching the art of killing people and destroying their dwellings and farms. He certainly offers this world no good. So what right has he to be proud and arrogant? And that lady, draped in silk and crowned with a hat laden with peacock feathers, sitting majestically in a coach pulled by three fine horses - where do her silk, her feathers and her horses come from? And how is it that she is not filled with shame displaying all this to those whose bodies are wrapped in rags and whose faces never know what soap is? And these grand stores, with all the jewels shining in their windows - what use are they to the hungry, the humiliated, the vanquished, and all those who are unable to enjoy a single item of their contents? Surely, one necklace or one bracelet, an earring or a ring among them, might be enough to feed a thousand of those who suffer hunger, or a thousand who need to be clothed, or to provide medicine for a thousand patients. How is it then that the neck of a single woman, her wrist, her ear or her finger, should be singled out to enjoy all that wealth, or that she should be of more importance than thousands of other human beings?

To be sure, this is a world turned upside-down; a world whose heart is in its pocket, its mind in its belly and its conscience in the dirt. The ugliest thing about it is that it claims to believe in a God who is all light, justice, beauty and love. If only its belief inspired its actions, it would not have suffered pain and misfortune, nor would it have tolerated a system that divided it into classes one above the other, with nobility for one and humiliation for the other, abundance for one and poverty for the other, power for one and subjugation for the other. If its actions had sprung from its belief, it would have been on the right path. But it is a world which staggers both left and right without knowing why it staggers or where it is heading. In spite of its spaciousness, it is still a narrow and limited world - a world which is choking with the dust and smoke of its sins. Its dust hurts me, and its smoke blinds my sight. In it, I am a stranger."

So Mikhail Naimy created for himself a world of his own; a

world in which he tried to protect himself from the "dust and smoke" of the outside world, and he found his world much more spacious than the outside world. In it he would wander freely, always to return puzzled by the new horizons to which these meditations had transported him. These journeys in the wilderness of the inner self never led him to despair. On the contrary, the more he steeped himself in the world of meditation, the greater became his yearning to unravel the mysteries of the human soul.

Living in two worlds - the world of his inner self, and the world of others - came to be a basic trait in Naimy's character and thinking. The world of others is, to him, another term for modern civilisation. Thus, when he rebels against this world of others, he is, in fact, expressing his denunciation of this civilisation. As a young student, we see him attacking modern civilisation vehemently, pointing out the elements of deception, falsehood and corruption in it, especially when he compares life in the cities with that in the country, where people lead a natural life close to the earth. Was he unconsciously defending the views of Rousseau and Tolstoy which he seems to have supported? Possibly. One thing seems to be clear, however, the more he came to know the world of others, the more he detested it. "There will come a day when I will sever my relations with the world and retreat to my own," he wrote in his diaries, a decision which he more or less implemented half a century later.

In the summer of 1909, Mikhail Naimy decided to spend the holiday in Biskinta. There we see him again in the places which he loved most, and which he seemed to feel was the only place where he really belonged. One may almost believe, reading his works, that nature itself around Sannin had the same feeling towards him as he had towards it - an ideal situation where harmony between Man and Nature is at its best. One incident in that summer may serve to illustrate the fine relationship which stirred his innermost thoughts. The young Mikhail Naimy was sitting, one afternoon, in the shade of the huge rocks of al-Shakhrub, where birds of all kinds used to nest and where the water of the Sannin Spring flows gently down. The young man's thoughts roamed freely with the lights and shadows, the music of the water flowing from the Spring, and with the cattle, the

shepherds and the harvesters in the fields before him in complete serenity. Within a matter of minutes, everything seemed to become blurred. He saw himself walking in a dark tunnel under the surface of the earth, and voices from the depth of his soul questioned him incessantly: Where does all this come from? Where is it going to? From God to God? And who, or what is God and why is there all this astounding variety in things, so that one never finds two identical blades of grass, or two flowers, or two fruits, or two men? What wisdom is there that all this should come from God, only to return to Him? What wisdom is there that it should, in the time between its coming and return, go through amazing phases of growth and decay, with all the pleasure and pain which accompany this transformation? If there is no wisdom in all this, and no aim, then does existence mean anything? And why should we cling to it?

"The darkness grows and the tunnel becomes narrower, and no answer comes from anywhere. I feel that even the breath is fading in my breast, and I almost shout for help. Suddenly, a very faint and distant ray of light appears. At that moment I feel my chest relieved of the pressure, the tunnel widens and the darkness is less dark. The feeling of relief becomes greater and it almost turns into a state of ecstasy. Then I feel as if many a gate within me begins to open, and as if God, for whom I am looking, will appear to me through them all, and that the walls and ceiling of the tunnel through which I am walking are slowly vanishing, and that in a trice, I will see God, know Him and talk to Him. But that moment was out of reach and it never came. Back I came to where I was before: to the rocks above me, to the flocks of birds hovering around their nests, to the harvesters and the cattle in the fields, to the water of the Spring trickling down the stream with the grass around it. I feel I have come back from a journey that went on for ever, after which I returned to the earth, as if from towering heights. But, at the same time, I feel I have come to be richer and vaster than I was. Things around me have come to be a part of myself, and myself a part of them. They are no longer strangers to me, nor I a stranger to them. They and I have come to be of one body and one soul, expanding to eternity.

That was a moment which later on filled my path with light."

That Mikhail Naimy went through this experience should not lead us to call him a mystic, as one Arab writer did. (4) For one thing, Naimy never made the claim that he received a pure and direct vision of the truth following this experience, nor has he ever preached the idea of casting away the pleasures of life. Moreover, a mystical experience is "Quite a definite and recognizable form of experience" which is not to be confused with visions and states of ecstasy. There is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the experience, but it could only be described as a "state of feeling" as distinct from a "mystical experience", although it had a "mystical" element. However, what interests us at this stage is that this experience had a tremendous impact upon his character and his way of thinking, which took a turn towards what might be termed Nature Mysticism.

Once back in Russia, we find Mikhail Naimy more and more involved in the life of that country, at a time when it was agitating to rid itself of the tyranny of its rulers and the class system which oppressed a large section of its people. In his fourth year in the Seminary in 1910, he took part in a strike declared by the students who clamoured for their freedom. "It is true" he says, "that I am a guest and a stranger in Russia but, as my life has come to be a part of the life of the country to a great extent, I have come to feel that I am one of its sons, feeling the great pressure to which its people are exposed by the Emperor and his entourage, and the higher classes which cling desperately to their rights, disregarding their duties towards the people." This atmosphere of oppression led to a wave of pessimism, wantonness and recklessness among the younger generation which Naimy strove to avoid. He kept his idealism, but at the same time felt a very strong sympathy with the oppressed Russians, as he was disturbed by the poverty of the masses suffering under the yoke of their oppressors.

Back with Varya, he "succumbed to the animal" in him, and soon after, he found himself yearning for retreat and work. It seems that this desire for solitude was enhanced whenever Naimy felt that something wrong was happening. This was the case when he first abstained from talking while in the Nazareth school,

after a friend had censured him for something he had never said. Now, after the love affair with Varya, he went with Alyosha to stay in isolation in a country house, hoping that he would be able to "regain in that solitude, what was lost of my tranquillity, delve into the treasuries of my inner self through poetry and meditation, thinking of my own life and life in general." Out of this solitude, he emerged with "The Frozen River", a poem in Russian in which he addressed the river Sula, on whose frozen surface he had walked with his friend Alyosha. His heart, like the river, was in chains and, while the river would some day break the chain, his heart would never be able to do so. Is this because these chains prevented him from understanding why things happened the way they did? One is left to wonder. The poem deals with the subject of Man and Nature: while Nature never imprisons the river for ever, Man is the prisoner of his world. The theme of Man and Nature comes later to take a prominent place in his writings.

In 1911, Mikhail Naimy's time in Russia came to an end. The five years he spent in that country left an indelible mark on his way of thinking and his personality. Tolstoy, whose philosophy of life impressed him, was his master. To Tolstoy "the arbiter of what is good and evil is not what people say and do, nor is it progress, but it is my heart and I."(6) One cannot fail to see, in Naimy's writings, that he too adopted this maxim, whether consciously or unconsciously, as a basic tenet of his philosophy. This great master of Russian literature had taken the Bible for his guide, and so did Mikhail Naimy, for he too was irritated to see "a Christianity where no Christ existed, which differed little from paganism except in name." It is possible that it was Tolstoy who made clear to him the hypocrisy of the Church, which veiled the light of Christ from the believers with thick clouds of ritual. The spiritual conflict in Tolstoy's life, and his attempts to lead a life based on the teachings of the Bible, were a source of inspiration for Naimy for he wrote:

"I knew something of that conflict, and I hoped most sincerely, that Tolstoy would attain victory in it. For me, that a single person should be able to come triumphant out of such a conflict, was some confirmation that, if I tried, I would be able

to win."

The tragic death of his master led Mihail Naimy to think of his own conflict with himself and with the world and where it would end.

All the time he was living in Russia, his thoughts would turn towards the Arab world. How shallow and insignificant are thought, art and literature amongst the Arabs, he would think to himself. It was in Russia that the seed of his rebellion against the literary concepts of the Arab world was sown.

By the end of his stay in Russia, he had acquired all the qualities of a rebel. His rebellion was not confined to the Arabs' concept of literature, for he also came to be a rebel against the "Establishment" in the world of faith. He became sceptical about what he had been taught by the Church: "After my return from Russia, I began to feel that the garment which the Church had wanted me to wear was too small, and that parts of it were being torn all the time." All that remained of what the Church had taught him was a deep reverence for the divine brilliance of Christ's personality and his sublime teachings. But even some aspects of Christ's teachings were subjected to questioning:

"For Christ did not solve for me the problem of evil and where it came from. Nor the the question of death and what followed it; for his preaching about a Day of Judgement, the time of which nobody knew except God, and an eternal life for the righteous and eternal fire for the wicked was incongruous to my mind with the sublime concept he gave me about His Father's love and justice."

Returning to Biskinta after five years in Russia, Mikhail Naimy found himself living in a spiritual and intellectual vacuum:

"For to whom could I talk at that time about the literary and artistic horizons which that short stay in Russia had opened for me? Where could I find in the Lebanon, or in its neighbours, people who could feel that the great masters in

the world of literature, theatre, painting sculpture or music in the West, had come to be part of their lives?."

This spiritual loneliness led Mikhail to think of going to France to study law, so he concentrated on the study of French in preparation for the journey. But fate had a different course in store for him. His brother Adîb, who had emigrated to the United States eleven years ealier, was in Biskinta at the time on a visit, and he managed to persuade Mikhail to accompany him back to the United States. So began a new chapter in Mikhail Naimy's life.

In the United States

The years spent in Russia, with all the new horizons it had opened up for him, had filled him with resentment for modern civilisation "which turned Man away from his right path, pushing him towards an abyss encompassed by covetousness, devoid of mercy, justice and love." For a sensitive young man who develops such an attitude towards modern civilisation as a result of living in a small Ukrainian town, it seems natural that New York should confirm his beliefs. His first impressions of the city were far from favourable:

"I felt that the city, with its gigantic buildings, its feverish hustle and bustle, was like a heavy load pressing against my chest. Suddenly I remembered Sannin and al-Shakhrub with all the peace they were endowed with, and the beauty that surrounded them, and the memory was painful."

With a sense of relief, Naimy left New York making his way to Walla Walla, a small town in Washington State, where his two elder brothers lived. In the plains around this small American town, he saw, for the first time in his life, machinery doing the work in the fields. Which, he asked himself, was better: a grain sown, harvested, threshed, sieved, milled and baked by the hand of Man, or one untouched by any hand except that of the machine, whose limbs were of steel and whose spirit was of oil; and where

was this machine going to lead us?

"The credit in increasing production and consumption goes to the machine. But this mechanical age does not pay any attention to the fact that the machine has not added a jot to our happiness, nor has it decreased our misery by an iota."

With great enthusiasm, Mikhail Naimy concentrated on learning English, with nothing to help him except an English-Arabic dictionary and a small book written by a Syrian to help immigrant Arabs to learn the language. As there were no evening classes in Walla Walla for studying the language, Mikhail decided to join an elementary school as a listener. There he sat with the boys, learning from them and from their teachers, then he moved to secondary school where he was treated like any other student. Within eight months of his arrival in the country, his English was good enough to enable him to join the University of Washington, where he graduated with a degree in Law and another in Arts.

As a university student, Mikhail found that the sort of life that his colleagues led did not interest him; baseball and football never attracted him. "Youth is the time when one should try to fathom the meaning of existence," he tells us in his auto-biography, reminiscing about that period of his life. This earnestness made him feel an outsider in his new environment. He felt more in harmony with foreign students, who seemed to him to take life more seriously than American students, and so he joined the Cosmopolitan Club in which he was the only Arab student and with whose members he made friends.

With the same enthusiasm with which he had devoured the masterpieces of Russian literature, Mikhail Naimy delved into the treasures of Anglo-Saxon literature. At the same time he started to write in Arabic. He found himself in a country where, unlike Russia, fellow Arabs formed a large community. On receiving a periodical called Al-Funūn, published in New York by his friend Nasīb ʿArīḍah, he was thrilled, for al-Funūn seemed to be a new phenomenon in the field of modern Arabic literature. Here, for the first timne, he read articles by Gibran (Jibrān), ʿArīḍah and al-Rīḥanī, writers who shared with him the same conception of

literature: no place here for the ornamental usage of words and linguistic jugglery which meant nothing.

"This is the good tidings of revival which you hoped would some day come to light amongst your countrymen since you first came to be familiar with Russian and world literature, and since you realised the numinous nature of the words, the strength of the pen when it does not degrade the word with lies, hypocrisy and charlatanism, and when it does not worship the letter rather than the spirit. Yes, Mikhail, these are the first drops which will be followed by a torrent. These few drops are a challenge for you, Mikhail. Have you anything to add to them? If you want to have your share in the coming torrent, this is your hour and day."

With these words Mikhail Naimy addressed himself and, full of zeal, he set off to write an article entitled "The Dawn of Hope after the Darkness of Despair" (7), in which he poured out his resentment and hatred for decadent literature - the literature of ornamentation, traditionalism, hypocrisy and triviality - which had not food for the heart or the soul, and which had no bearing on life. Here, in this article, we see the tangible outcome of the rebellion that had fermented inside him since he first came into contact with Russian literature. Al-Funūn published Mikhail Naimy's article and his battle against traditionalism in literature was launched. This article was followed by other articles in the same vein. Nasīb ʿArīḍah, the editor of al-Funūn, wrote to him saying that his articles were being well-received among the emigrants in the States, and predicted that they would cause a good deal of tumult in the Arab world. Unfortunately, al-Funūn, which became the vehicle that propagated these new ideas about the meaning of literature, had to cease publication for financial reasons.

In 1914, the First World War broke out and the Lebanon suffered the affliction of drought. Mikhail Naimy, who had decided to return to his country in 1916, was destined to stay in the States until 1932. During the war, a secret society called 'Free Syria' was formed by the Arabs in the United States, which worked for the liberation of Syria from Turkish tyranny. Mikhail

Naimy joined, but the society soon disintegrated. (8)

A young Scotsman with whom Mikhail Naimy shared a room in his third year at the university, and who was a member of a theosophical society, interested his friend in the idea of metempsychosis and the transmigration of souls. The idea appealed to him, and he adopted it as a substitute for the idea of Original Sin and the Day of Judgement. Mikhail Naimy later admitted that "the idea of metempsychosis which leads to complete knowledge and complete freedom came to be the fundamental basis on which the whole philosophy of my life was to be founded, after that "accidental" meeting with my Scottish friend." (9)

The appeal of metempsychosis is perhaps due to the fact that it is strongly linked with most spiritual teachings known in the world whether in the east or the west. Later, it came to be an important factor in moulding his philosophic doctrine, which is based on the belief that our life is governed by a Cosmic Order, and that death is no more than a "pause" in a continuous movement which will ultimately lead Man to become one with the Absolute.

Living in New York after graduating from Washington University, Mikhail Naimy set himself one aim: "the reappraisal of literary standards among those who speak my language and among my fellow countrymen", with thousands of miles separating him from them, while living in the wwhirlpool that is called New York. "What self-deception. . ." he would think to himself, "but let Fate laugh the way it likes, for as long as I can write, and as long as al-Funūn is there, I am in no trouble."

Finding that the lofty task of reappraising literary standards among the Arabs while living in New York hardly earned him his daily bread, he found himself a job with the Rùssian Commercial Navy office and later as a secretary to the Russian officer who worked with the Bethlehem Steel Company, which exported armaments to the Russians. It was a relief to leave New York for Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, but the thought that he earned his living out of the machinery of the war was a source of remorse to him which he found difficult to allay.

In 1917 the United States declared war on Germany, and a law was passed by which all young men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-one should register for military service. Mikhail Naimy did so "because it is my nature to abide by the law." It

is surprising that a man like him, who hated bloodshed and preached love, and who believed that Man was the most exalted of all beings, should willingly take part in the butchery of war simply because he wanted to abide by the law, especially since he could have avoided conscription as he was not an American citizen. (10) At all events, Mikhail Naimy found himself a soldier in the Army of the United States. Whatever course one's life takes, he thought to himself, it is certainly traced by the "Unseen Hand" which plans one's life and that of the universe. Our plans play but a small role in shaping our lives. There is a power, other than our own, that shapes our destiny.

His meditations on war seemed to confirm his belief that Man's life is predestined.

"For what have I got against a German peasant in Stuttgart, or an Austrian carpenter in Vienna, or a Hungarian goldsmth in Budapest, or a Turkish shepherd in Adana? Why should I be dragged away from my family, my home and my work to be humiliated and despised and to be driven, against my will, to bear down against people whom I do not know and against whom I have no grudge?" He often wondered about the logic of events that led him to where he found himself, but never found an answer, except the consolation that "there must exist in my life that which calls for such an experience. Had I not needed that experience, it would not have found its way into my life. The only course I could take was to acquiesce in it. When I extract out of it the moral necessary for my life, it will depart never to come back. Then, after going through it, I will be the richer for it."

Being on guard at a military hospital crowded with wounded soldiers, he happened to hear the screams of a young mutilated German soldier who kept shouting "Mother. . . Mother. . .", Mikhail Naimy stopped at the door where the screaming came from "feeling ashamed of myself and of the rifle slung on my shoulder. What value have I, and what value has my rifle in the face of such a scream "Mother. . . Mother"? Are these screams anything but an accusation against me, against my rifle, and against anyone who carries one? It is, in fact, an accusation against those who stand behind me, and those who stand behind that

wounded young soldier and his rifle." Mikhail Naimy found himself deep in thought, trying to think of that "mother." To him she was more than one single mother, but every mother, everywhere and at any time. "She is in fact life itself, out of which every life emanates. That poor young man is beseeching its help against those who abuse its sanctity, deny its bounties and mutilate its beauty, just because they covet a gold, coal or iron mine, an oil-well, a forest of rubber trees or a market for their worthless commodities."

The war came to an end and Mikhail Naimy was sent by the Army for a course at Rennes University in France. There he studied the history of France, the history of French literature and art, and the history of law and constitution. He mastered the French language and learned a good deal about France. At the university, Madeline, a French girl, took a liking to him. He was not in love with the girl, but tried to remain friendly with her. She appeared to be thinking of marriage, but he, not being in love with her, seemed to regard marriage as a burden which would prevent him achieving his aims in life. It is interesting to notice that, whenever we see him involved in an emotional relationship, we find him inclined to retreat to his inner world, trying to delve into its depths and to define its relations with the "outside world." The war and his share in it seem to have enhanced this inclination to ponder. What had this mad world reaped out of four years of killing, destruction and misery? The "Big Four" were holding meetings in Versailles to deceive the world by pretending that they alone were endowed by God with the wisdom to found a new world out of the rubble of the old. Woodrow Wilson was the only one amongst them for whom he had respect, but Wilson was an idealist, who was no match for the pragmatists, Clemenceau and Lloyd George. And what had the Arabs got out of it all? The Balfour Declaration 'which permits a stranger to enter a house full of people, by sheer force, and by the might of His Britannic Majesty, to say to its inhabitants, "you need not worry, the house will remain yours, but it will become my 'national' home, nothing more.' But at least, he would think to himself, the war resulted in putting an end to the Turkish tyranny over the Arab world.

But now where? The Lebanon? What would he do there? Where

would he get the fare from? To New York? What would he do there either, especially since al-Funūn had ceased publication? Suddenly, he received a letter from his friend Nasīb ʿArīḍah, in which he lamented the demise of al-Funūn. Should that torch be allowed to die forever? No, Mikhail Naimy thought to himself, that was a spark which should not be put out. So he decided to return to the States. Back in New York, he received a letter from Gibran which urged him to work towards the revival of al-Funūn. But as the efforts to revive al-Funūn failed, Naimy, Gibran and ʿArīḍah found themselves turning towards al-Sāʾih, a periodical of limited circulation in the Arab community, as a new vehicle to disseminate their literary ideas and thoughts. However, Naimy was again faced with the problem of earning his living, and of all things, he found himself in the world of commerce, selling ladies' nightdresses for a company that was run by three wealthy Syrian emigrants. It did not take him long to master his new job and to earn enough money to survive.

The world of commerce, like that of war, provided Mikhail Naimy with food for thought. In the battle field he had seen how Man was capable of killing his fellow men. In the world of commerce, he witnessed how the Dollar was capable of destroying Man's soul. Out of his experience in this new field, he writes:

"The Dollar is a magician, cunning and shameless. How often it assails Man's conscience only to leave it paralysed, or his insight only to blind it, or his ideals only to destroy them."

In a huge building in Manhattan, occupied mainly by commercial agencies, he found himself a dark little room with a small window which overlooked the backyard of the building. In that little room which he called his eyrie, in a city where such rooms abound, he used to spend his evenings struggling, not in the field of war or commerce, but in that of the mind and the word. "As for my heart, I never paid any attention to it, unaware that, when I came to live in that humble room, I was to be involved in an emotional battle."

Bella, a woman of thirty and the wife of a drunkard who was the landlord of the house, fell in love with him. In the absence of the husband, he spent the Christmas vacation with her "in a

feast of pleasure and happiness." No religious or social scruples were able to stop him from having his love affair with her. "But if that was sinful, it was the sin of nature, which influenced my blood through a spark coming from the blood of a person which had in it the same warmth and the same willingness to be inflamed." This love affair with Bella, like the one he had with Varya eight years earlier, seemed again to arouse a conflict between his mind and his heart. Before his love affair with Bella, he was wholly immersed in the activities of the new literary movement and in his own meditations about life. Then we see him philosophizing for himself the meaning of his existence by describing his soul as "an emanation of a god," but now, with the emotions overpowering the mind, prohibitions are left to the fuqaha (theologians):

Yā rafīqī - rafīqu jismī wa-rūhī
Wa-sharīkī fī ni'matī wa-shaqā'ī
Qul ra'ainā ṭahāratan wa-jamālan
Lā fasādan fī ṣun'i rabbi 'l-samā'
Fa-abaḥnā li'l-nafsi kulla munāhā
Wa-taraknā 'l-ḥarāma li'l-fuqahā'
(O, my companion, companion of my body and my soul,
Partner in my well-being and in my distress
Say we saw purity and beauty
Not wickedness in the makings of the Lord of Heaven
We permitted the soul in all its wishes
and we left the forbidden to the scribes)

(translation by C.Nijland)

His relationship with Bella and the conflict it created in him, since he felt guilty for having had an emotional relationship with a married woman, inspired him to write several poems in which this inner conflict was expressed. Al-'Irāk (12) (The Conflict) is perhaps the best among these. In fact it is a good example of Naimy's poetry in that it reflects the conflict of his inner soul suffering the agony of the struggle between his sublime and idealistic aspirations and the animal which pulls him down and imprisons him in the flesh. The same undertone is also

detectable in "The Frozen River." It expresses his thoughts in this phase of his life; for in this short poem, he describes how Satan enters into his heart to find an angel in it. The two fight against each other, each claiming "the house" to be his. The poet watches the struggle. Unmoved, he turns towards God, wondering how his hands made his heart the way it was made, allowing Satan and an angel to fight for its possession. He never gets an answer and he finds himself, long after asking his questions, in doubt and confusion. Is it evil or good that dwells in his heart? Whatever the answer was, Mikhail Naimy became more and more attached to Bella at a time when he was involved in establishing al-Rābitah al-Qalamīyah, (the Pen League), of which he was the secretary, and which was destined to play an important role in the history of modern Arabic literature. (13) However, he seemed to be in love, with Bella, for the first time in his life. "I came to have no better hope than to fill her life with dreams, to strew her path with roses, and to pervade her days with happiness, peace and tranquillity." These are certainly the words of a man deeply in love. But his love is that of a poet, extremely romantic, idyllic and other-worldly. It is not the kind of love which urges the lover to "live" with the beloved. "For I did not want my heart and hers to follow the course followed by lovers everywhere and all through time: the course of joy ending in loneliness, hope leading to disillusion and pleasure breeding pain." One wonders whether this was an attempt to rationalize a sense of guilt which he felt towards that love affair. In a brief sentence in his autobiography, one tends to detect this sense of guilt, when he says: "Whenever my mind brought me back to face the social circumstances which surrounded my love, making it look sinful, I felt as if I had stolen it the way Prometheus stole fire from the hearth of the Gods." Moreover, in his heart of hearts, he seemed to feel that love should rise above the desire of the flesh. He felt too that Bella was a stranger to the world of imagination in which he lived, "far away from the yearnings that grip my soul, which urge me to seek a meaning for existence." Occasionally, he even doubted that the relationship with Bella was a relationship of true love. Maybe it was evil for both of us, he would think to himself. This led him to ponder over what evil and good

meant. Again we notice that this love affair with Bella drew him back to his inner self, to wonder about the nature and meaning of things. Here again, he turned to poetry to express his inner feelings: in a poem entitled "To the Sea", (Ya bahr) (14) he implores the waves to tell him whether evil and good are embedded in them as they are embedded in Man. Like the ebb and flow of the sea, the poem concludes that evil and good exist side by side in Man:

"waqaftu wa'l-lailu dājin, wa' l-baḥru karrun wa-farru
fa-lam yujibniya baḥrun, wa-lam yujibniya barru
wa-'indamā shāba layālī, wa-kaḥḥala 'l-'ufqa fajru
sami'tu nahran yughannī "al-kaunu ṭayyun wa-nashru
fī 'l-nāsi khairun wa-sharrun, fī 'l-baḥri maddun wa-jazru"
("I stood engulfed in darkness with the sea, now coming
in close to me and then withdrawing far,
Neither the sea nor the land answered (my questioning)
And when the night came to its end with the horizon adorned by dawn,
I heard a river singing: "The folds of the Universe
have an inward and outward aspect,
Good and evil are embedded in people, as the Sea has ebb and flow.")

In this period of his life, Mikhail Naimy was deeply involved in the battle to revive Arabic literature which was being actively urged in the States. At the same time, he was equally involved in the battle of love with Bella. She and her husband bought a house in the countryside near New York, and Mikhail Naimy moved to live with them. What a great relief he found in leaving New York to live in the country. Here he found himself living in the open country he loved, away from the hustle and bustle of New York. His love of nature filled him with a feeling of satisfaction and contentment. There he walked by the streams, sang with the birds and remembered his younger days in Sannin. That short stay in the countryside seemed to confirm his feeling that he was born to live with nature, unspoilt by the hand of Man. But how long could he maintain that relationship with Bella, when he felt that it was a source of suffering for a

third person? Suddenly, he managed to persuade her and her husband that it would be better if he kept away from them. His feeling of guilt seems to have motivated this decision: "this is what love rules if it aims at purifying itself of its sorrow."

Back in New York, Mikhail Naimy was faced with other problems, for the three Syrian brothers for whom he worked were on the verge of bankruptcy. His brother Najib wrote to him from the Lebanon expressing his wish to emigrate to the New World. He felt that Najib would face the same disillusionment there which he was facing. "Why should he exchange the purity of his land, the purity of Sannin and all its beauty, for all the wealth in Mexico? Has he not heard of the proverb "a contented peasant is a sultan in disguise"? He is, in Biskinta, a sultan with nobody to give him orders or to upbraid him. There, nobody demands a penny from him. He works, but health and contentment is his reward." These thoughts about the emigration of the Lebanese to the New World inspired him to write a short story which he called The Cuckoo-Clock, "sā'at al-kūkū" is perhaps one of the most revealing short stories about the attitude and feelings of Mikhail Naimy towards Western civilisation and way of life. A summary of the story is given in Chapter 5. This clock is a symbol for complex modern civilisation, and the elusive happiness which people seek in it.

In 1925 Mikhail Naimy no longer worked for the Syrian brothers, who went bankrupt. In the following three years, he dabbled in various fields of business, at the end of which he was unemployed for a while, until he found himself a job as a salesman for the Encyclopaedia Britannica. As he was well-known amongst Syrian emigrants, he managed to sell a large number of copies to the businessmen among them who, for reasons of snobbery, were keen to have it in their libraries. But, despite this "success" in this new field of business, he rebelled against it: "I was overwhelmed by a feeling of rebellion against this froth of life I found myself fumbling in." This froth of life was the trivialities with which human beings preoccupied themselves: their "knowledge", "faith" and "wealth." These, he thought, formed the essence of their lives, when they were no more than its banalities and superficialities. This urge to rid himself of the superficialities of life was expressed in a poem

which he called "Now", (Al-An)

ghadan aruddu ḥībati ʾl-nāsi li' l-nāsi
wa-ʿan ghināhum astaghnī bi-iflāsī
wa-astariddu ruhūnan lī bi-dhimmatihim
fa-qad rahantu lahum fikrī wa-iḥsāsī
wa-ruhtu atjuru fī aswāq kasbihim
fa-mā kasabtu siwā hammin wa-waswāsi
wa-kam fataḥtu lahum qalbī fa-mā labithū
an nassabū baʿlahum fi qudsi aqdāsī
(Tomorrow I shall yield again
Such gifts as I received of men:
I shall not need their hoard of pence
In my abundant indigence,
But therewith purpose to redeem
The thought I pledged, my mortgaged dream.
I trafficked in their gainful mart,
But all I gained was grief of heart
And cheated hope; infatuated,
I opened wide my spirit's gate
But they that to its altar won
Set up their golden calf thereon.

(translation by A.J. Arberry) (15)

In this poem, he yearned for the day when he would become "a pure soul, free of the grip of death, and the exterior appearances of life, through which Man is deluded into believing that he is fettered by the chains of Time and Space, when it is he, if he only knew it, who fills Time and Space:"

ghadan uʿīdu baqāyā ʾl-ṭīni li'l-ṭīni
wa-uṭliqu ʾl-rūḥa min sijni ʾl-tukhāmini
wa-atruku ʾl-mauta li'l-mautā wa-man waladū
wa'l-khaira wa'l-sharra li'l-dunyā wa-li'l-dīni

wa-albasu al-ʿuriya dirʿan lā tuḥaṭṭimuhu
aidai ʾl-malāʾiki au aidai ʾl-shayāṭīni
fa-lā turawwaʿunī nāru ʾl-jaḥīmi wa-lā
majālisu ʾl-hūri fi ʾl-firdausi tughrīnī

ghadan ajūzu ḥudūdi 'l-samʿi wa'l-baṣarī
fa-udriku 'l-mubtadā 'l-maknūna fī khabarī
(Tomorrow I shall further fare
Beyond the bourne of sense, to where
Dwells the far percept of the mind;
Among the stars my path shall wind,
And not a clod but will proclaim
There lies a relic of my name.
Doom spells my doom, and death my death;
Yet 'tis my fate, while I have breath,
Against the Fates to wage affray.
Tomorrow? Why, since yesterday
Was never mine, let Now make naught
Tomorrow in my speech and thought.)

(translation by A.J. Arberry)

It is not surprising that a Man, whose poetry roams in the world of the infinite, hoping that Man will break the chains that bind him to his selfish and immediate needs, should rebel against the "job" of selling, even the Encylopaedia Britannica, to survive. Suddenly, Mikhail Naimy decided to desert New York, which he always referred to as the "frightful whirlpool", making his way to Walla Walla, where his two brothers lived. Before leaving New York he expressed the yearnings of his soul in a poem which he called "Hunger." In this short poem we can detect the "spaciousness" of the private world which he created for himself, as opposed to the "narrowness" of life in that city:

"Into my heart a seed was cast.
And it took root and sprouted fast.
It spread so wide, and reached so high
Until it filled the earth and sky.

And now its boughs are weighted low
With fairer fruit than angels know

Yet I, whose heart-sap feeds the root,
Though famished, dare not touch the fruit." (16)

Away from the turmoil of New York and the maddening rush to sell the Britannica to Syrian merchants, Mikhail Naimy isolated himself in a little hut which belonged to his brother Adib, situated in a green valley by the bank of a river. There, he was in his element:

"Here I feel as if I am a different person - not the same person who was in New York. This little hut seems to me like a palace in the paradise which the lost, the tortured and the displaced dream of." As if he had intentionally withdrawn in order to see his life in perspective, he reviewed his whole past life:

"New York, Biskinta, Poltava, Seattle, al-Shakhrub, battlefields in France, Varya, Madeleine, Bella, pre-Islamic poets, members of al-Rabitah, and a thousand mental visions, a thousand memories, all meet in this little hut. They are all intermingled in complete harmony. Here, none weighs me in his scales. For my inner world and the world around me are but one, where beginnings and endings meet, distances vanish, measures and scales cease to do their work. My value is far beyond what my mind and my imagination could ever grasp. A few days ago, whenever I took the subway in New York, my value was no more than a few cents for the company which ran it. Whenever I entered a restaurant, a store, or a theatre, my value in the eyes of the proprietors never exceeded the value of the dollars I spent in their buildings. How often I endeavoured to raise that value - even for myself - by going to museums, exhibitions, libraries, lectures, concert-halls, but never did I leave with a feeling that my world was wider, happier, or more beautiful than it had been."

Mikhail Naimy's stay in that isolated spot in the country-side stimulated thoughts about the relationship between Man and Nature: one day he went to the nearby river to fish. Every time he dipped his line into the water, a clever fish ate the bait without being hooked. He was seized with anger. What an impertinent little fish he thought to himself, to mock and ridicule me . . . but after a second thought, he imagined what that fish was saying to itself about him. "A fisherman . . . eh?

And what kind of a fisherman? Here he is, a man who had his head stuffed with all kinds of "knowledge" and "philosophies" and who claims at the same time that he loves all creatures! That is the sort of man he is, with nothing dearer to his heart than tampering with the life of a little fish in a little stream." But the fish was caught at last and he was again seized with violent anger at himself.

"At that moment, I felt myself to be the subject of condemnation and curses pouring on me, all of a sudden, from all around me - from Heaven, the air, the earth, the river, from every pebble, tree and blade of grass, from every drop of blood in my veins the cry went up: a criminal, a thief, and a mean creature you are! What heroism motivates you, with all the strength of body and mind you have, to fight against a little fish seeking her livelihood in such a little stream, only to inflict unmercifully abominable torture such as this on her? It is not hunger that spurs you to torture her . . . it is nothing but your greed and what you call sport and amusement! Woe for such a sport that you derive out of torturing creatures, and woe for an amusement that turns your mind away from your worries, only by depriving other creatures of life, when they have no worries like yours. If you know the value of life for yourself, how is it that you deny others that value? If you hate to suffer pain yourself, how do you inflict it on others? You are no more than a criminal, a thief and a wretch." So he extricated the fish from the hook and threw it back into the stream, determined never again to cause any creature to suffer pain, by his hands, his tongue, his thoughts or his conscience.

In this isolated spot, Mikhail Naimy wrote several poems in English. In one of these poems which he entitled "Sparks" (17), he was inspired by the sparks of a fire which he lit outside the hut, and which he sat by and watched:

"My camp fire crackles; and the spark,
Imprisoned long in limb and bark,
Leaps for an instant into sight
And is embosomed by the night
And I, a prisoner of time,

A spark embedded in the slime
Of flesh and blood, as in a trance
Behold their weird and mystic dance.

O glowing hearts of forests deep,
Do you but pass from sleep to sleep?
Do you remember as you glow
Where you slept but a while ago?

And in your brief awakenings
Are there no patterns of the things
The hands of Mother Life had spread
So lovingly about your bed:-
Of darkness-bound and age-gnarled roots
Nursing their young and tender shoots?
Of upflung boughs and budding leaves
Swaddled in moonlight's silver sheaves?
Of golden threads too subtly spun
From magic spindles by the sun?
Of lovelorn winds and love-drunk breeze
Aswoon at noontide 'mong the trees?
Of tearful skies and laughing streams
And birds that filled with song your dreams?

O tiny stars of firmaments
Unknown to song, are these laments
You chant as you ascend the scales
Of fire to other hills and dales
Am I a monster in your eyes
Who shattered love-cemented ties,
Or are you singing praise to me
For having helped to set you free?

My camp fire sways and gasps and dips,
And ashes slowly seal its lips;
And what is hid behind the seal
The jealous night would not reveal."

The isolation and the summer drew to an end, and he had to

go back to that "frightful whirlpool" to face again the problem of earning his living. There, he was offered a job as a salesman of embroideries in a store owned by a Syrian immigrant. Here he made friends with two Syrians: Iskandar Yāzijī and Emile Ḍōmaṭ, who have been, up to the present day, two of his closest friends. For a man of his character and nature, making friends is not an easy matter: "A friend is a person who understands you without uttering a word, and whom you understand when he makes no more than a gesture. Your soul and his are like two flowers, or two fruits on the same bough." He describes his friendship with these two men as "two roses in my life and theirs. I have pity for those whose lives are barren of such roses, for their paths are onerous, dry and hard, even if they have them paved with gold and jewels."

Through this friendship and through his correspondence with his younger brother Nasīb who was studying agriculture in the University of Montpellier in France, we learn about Mikhail Naimy's views on life. In a letter which he sent to Nasīb in 1929, he mentioned something about his feelings towards returning to the Lebanon, in which he said:

"As for the other reason for delaying my return (to the Lebanon), it is that I hope to stay there permanently once I decide to do so, and to start there a kind of life closer to my heart and mind than the one I am leading now. But this step requires a kind of renunciation which I am unable to undertake. The renunciation I have in mind (and I imagine that you understand what I mean by that) could never be achieved except when an inner war in me is waged, which results in the intellect winning the day against desire, the soul conquering the body, and the inner being triumphant against the outer being. Before I am sure of myself, and before I am sure that such a renunciation does not hurt my parents, or cause harm to a relative or a non-relative, I will never take the step."

Mikhail Naimy explained later in his autobiography that the renunciation he had in mind was modelled on Buddha's and Christ's renunciation of the world and its glories and the "limited self." The idea of severing his relations with the outside world to live

in his own world, seems to have been in the back of Mikhail Naimy's mind since he first went to Russia. On the other hand, he never seemed to aim at living entirely on his own, ignoring the world around him; it looks as if he always intended living with others without letting himself and his ideals be submerged by what he calls the superficialities of life that seem to preoccupy them. He wanted his attitude towards life to be based on his own inner feelings and his own philosophy. What he seemed to be striving to achieve was freedom from subservience to other people's conventional attitudes towards life, which, on the whole, seemed to him wrong. Moreover, the ultimate goal of this aspiration, if achieved, was not freedom from the pressure of the outside world for its own sake, but a kind of freedom which would enable him to reveal, to those who live outside the realm of his world, his own concept of the true nature of Man, the shape his relationship with the whole world should take, and the foundations on which his life should be based. In short, the aim was to provide people with a "philosophy." Mikhail Naimy did not admit as much in so many words, nor did he seem to be prone to preach his ideals to people. He is, in fact the first to admit the weakness of human nature. What he refused to accept was that this weakness is inherent in Man's character.

Between 1929 and 1932, Mikhail Naimy was again involved in a love affair with a girl whom he called Niunia in his autobiography. This relationship came to an end, as he found that the girl was not interested in any problems that occupied his thoughts. "Nothing in life interested her other than satisfying her sexual desires and her artistic tendencies. Matters that preoccupied my thoughts incessantly - life and death, where we come from and where we end, good and evil, the aim of my existence in a world such as I live in - all these questions and their like were far from her mind. In vain I tried to arouse her interest in such matters." Here again it looks as if he thought that the relationship with Niunia was wrong, that the girl would soon become a stranger to him at which time he would retire to his own shell - to his loneliness which accompanies him and would always accompany him "in the same way that it accompanied all those who were not satisfied with the froth of life and its superficialities, and those who wanted to

fathom the depths of the great powers that lay hidden in them. Those who, when they came to know these powers, used them for their own good and for the good of others; and through their knowledge came to know the Universe and the powers that guided it, for these were the same powers that lay dormant in them." Here Mikhail Naimy returns again to poetry to express these thoughts. He wrote several poems on the subject in English. One of these was entitled, "My Solitude":

My Solitude, she'll never roam
Your sunless, moonless skies.
She'll never tread your trackless wastes,
Nor sail your shoreless seas.
She'll never plumb your yawning chasms,
Nor scale your rugged peaks.
Her winged feet will never dance
Upon your slipp'ry moss.

Her honeyed lips will never touch
Your cup of virgin gall.
Her mother-heart will never hear
The cries of your waif dreams.
And never will her love-strung soul
Vibrate with your mute songs.

Alone we were, my Solitude,
Alone we'll ever be.
And yet, how vast, my Solitude,
We have become, how free!
In her, with her, through her we stretch
Unto infinity.

1932 saw the return of Mikhail Naimy to the Lebanon. The hope of all those years in foreign lands at last came true. But even this was a matter which was predestined. Shortly before leaving the States, he asked a girl, jokingly, to open the Bible and to point out any line in the page she opened. The line read: "Go back home, he said, and make known all God's dealing with thee." (18) The thought which crossed Mikhail Naimy's mind

before his return to the Lebanon are revealing:

"Is it not that I am tired of this civilisation which is submerged by the dust it stirs in running after things that seem to me to be no more than a mirage? What I am looking for I will never find here in this dust or in that mirage. I will find it in isolation with myself in the bosom of Sannin. It is there that I can stand naked before Heaven, the rocks, the breeze, the trees, the birds, and before my conscience. There, I will rid myself of all the contamination and dirt. Only then can I open my heart to the light which will never fail me. There, I will gather the fragments of myself, and thus be able to know myself. My estrangement from myself has lasted for too long, and he who is a stranger to himself is a stranger to everything.

What relation do I have with the millions here, whose backs are whipped by the Dollar? They bleed, but they lick their wounds, only to continue their race, achieving nothing except death. What concern of mine is the pleasure that the Dollar creates for them, to make them forget the misery of their life?"

It is significant that, after spending twenty years in the United States, Mikhail Naimy was confirmed in his belief that he was unable to associate himself with the "civilisation" and "way of life" of that country, a civilisation which he denounced as corrupting to the human soul. This was at a time when millions of emigrants from all over the world, including the Lebanon, strove hard to associate themselves with their adopted country and its way of life. He also felt that the role of Al-Rābitah in the States had come to an end, and that its revolutionary ideas were to be carried on in the Arab world itself. Al-Rābitah by that time had supporters all over that part of the world, and he would be able to resume the struggle in the field of Arabic literature in its natural milieu.

No one gives a better description of the impact of New York on Mikhail Naimy than Nadeem Naimy in his work, Mikhail Naimy, an Introduction, when he says:

"Discontented with the world without, Naimy was driven under the impact of New York to seek shelter in the world within. As he went deeper and deeper into the recesses of his soul all those

types of teachings in the world which emphasised the human self as the alpha and omega of life and as containing the key to Man's emancipations from the temporary, the transient and the corrupt to the eternal, the permanent and the absolute, struck him with increasing vividness. Christ, Tolstoy, Platonism and the Eastern theosophies with which Naimy's youth had been saturated, re-emerged in his mind and heart with stronger force, and he felt himself more than ever before ruthlessly divided between two worlds: the world symbolised by New York, which he despised but in which he was forced to live, and the ideal world he conceived in thought and imagination but was unable to realise. Between the two he felt himself a vagrant soul, a strange wanderer at home with neither the world he conceived nor the one he inhabited. When earlier in his formative years he was confronted either in Nazareth or in Poltava with a similar state of spiritual torment, he used to withdraw from the outside world and resort to periods of utter silence, confiding only in his pen and diary. In his present situation, committed to his everyday work and to public life, though actual silence was no more possible, the pen and the diary were still available. Why not then, Naimy must have thought, attempt to write the diary of an imaginary man who can be supposed to be facing the same spiritual crisis, and consequently, to have committed himself to silence. The only difference this time would be that the diary so written, unlike the one written in Poltava, should be intended for publication." (19)

Back to Biskinta

Biskinta, al-Shakhrub and Sannin – there Mikhail Naimy found himself again after twenty years of wandering, filled with a feeling of enchantment. Here was the part of the world to which he belonged. A world where men and women lived in peace, tilling the land with their own hands, with their souls safe from the crushing paws of the machine. "Do excuse my rough hands" a woman said to him, shaking hands with him on his return. "I am the one to apologise – my hands are far too smooth!" he answered. "What a world this is, in which the giving hand apologises to the one that receives. I say to you that the hand made rough by toil, is

a hand that shakes that of the Lord and works with it in giving birth to the good of the earth."

Away from life in the "frightful whirlpool", and surrounded by the peace and calm of Biskinta, the civilisation of the West, seen in perspective, seemed to him a "civilisation of machines and crises." (20) The Depression in the States was not a plight singular to that country, but "the plight of a civilisation whose head is in its pocket, and whose heart is in its factory. If you press the pocket hard then it will choke. If you close the gates of its factories, you will be closing the gates of its heart." That Western civilisation has enabled men to cover thousands of miles in a matter of hours is of no importance in his view, as long as the "distance" between Man and what he knows about his inner self is still the same.

After his return to the Lebanon, one of the main themes of his talks, writings and general outlook revolved round the bankruptcy of modern Western civilisation, its inherently inhuman nature and harshness. Instead of the little rooms in which he lived in New York, overlooking the backyards of huge buildings occupied by commercial agencies, he built himself a little hut made of tree branches in al-Shakhrub, where he came to spend his summers in isolation. There, he hardly read the daily newspapers "lest they should interrupt the serenity of my isolation or spoil my meditations." He came to be known in the Arab World as "The Hermit of al-Shakhrub" (21). In his little hermitage, Mikhail Naimy devoted his time to reading and writing and occasionally looked after cattle or worked on the land. The villagers would see him carrying his sickle or leading the cows to the Spring. The life he led seemed to stem from a genuine love for the land, for nature, and for those who are closest to it. He wished to be close to those who spend their lives in the company of the earth and cattle, to be one of them, a partner who was no better than they were. Lying on his bed in his hut, he would often go back in his mind to the gloomy little rooms in which he had lived in New York, comparing them with his hut:

"I often felt overwhelmed by the feeling that He who provided me with all these blessings, has been too generous to me. For purity and the light of the sun filled my days, and my

nights were seas of calm and peace. Tides of feelings, devoid of desires, suspicion, rancour, hatred or covetousness for the wealth of others, shrouded my whole being. All this for nothing, and for the love of God the Generous, and for the period of six months without fear of rain, heat or cold."

Mikhail Naimy's philosophy of acceptance of the "will of life", which verges on fatalism or quietism, was tested when his brother Nasib, to whom he was attached, died after a long illness. Hurrying to Sannin to bring his dying brother a handful of snow which he had asked for, Mikhail Naimy prayed for his brother's life, though he knew he was dying:

"but if he does not die today, he will after a few days or years. So will I. So will every creatures on the face of this earth. Or do I want, for the sake of my brother and myself, to banish death from the earth? No, for life is the food of death, and death is the provision of life. They both complement each other, and as such there is no point in talking of "life" and "death." What we should think of is the power beyond and further than both, the power that no mind or imagination can grasp now, the power which no pen or tongue can describe."

Although this attitude towards the tragic death of his brother was congruous with Mikhail Naimy's philosophy, one cannot not fail to see that it enhanced his disposition to live in his own world; for it was after the death of Nasib that Mikhail Naimy took a huge hollow rock in al-Shahkrub (which he called "The Ark" as he imagined it to resemble Noah's Ark) for his hermitage. In this hollow rock he would spend most of his day meditating, writing or talking to people who came to see him from all parts of the Arab World. He now seemed to be confirmed in his renunciation of the glories and desires of this world. "Some time ago" he wrote, "I buried five of my fifty-five desires: the desire for power, the desire for wealth, the desire for women, the desire for fame, and the desire to be immortal. But yesterday, I thought of visiting the graves of my buried desires: over the first grave, I found a crown on the top of which there was a worn out shoe; over the second I found a heap of gold which

ants had taken for a dwelling place; over the third, I found a white lily to which butterflies swarmed to smell and caress it; over the fourth, I found the skeleton of an old woman mangled by worms, crows and snakes. As to the fifth grave, I found it open with nothing buried in it" (22). This yearning for immortality seemed now to be the only desire which he was unable to overcome. In this he thought of himself not as an individual, but as the symbol of Man in his wish to overcome death. It is not the desire of Man to be made immortal by his work, but the desire for the immortality of his soul. It is not only that he himself "buried the desire for power", but that he felt repulsed by other people's craving for it. How far they are, he considered, from the sublime teaching of Christ when he says: "he that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (23). A well-known politician asked him to accept nomination for parliament in his group, assuring him that this would be followed by a seat in the cabinet. The well-known politician hinted that a Foreign Power was beind the suggestion. Mikhail Naimy's answer was a definite refusal "for if I won membership of parliament and the ministry, I would lose myself and all that I have built over the years. What I have built for myself is too dear for me to sacrifice for the sake of a seat in parliament or in the cabinet." When offered a large sum of money to take part in a propaganda campaign for a "certain country" at a time when he was in need, Mikhail Naimy rejected the offer with contempt. There is no reason to doubt that his integrity is exemplary. He is not only a famous writer in the Arab world, but a man who enjoys the greatest respect and admiration. What is difficult to understand is his attitude to women. He admitted that sexual desire is one of the most difficult desires to repress, but "even this desire surrendered to me after I was able to turn my mind and heart away from it to something much more sublime. I no longer look upon women the way the male looks upon the female. Mine is the outlook of a man who believes that his nature and that of the woman are complementary, not through the close union of their bodies, but through the union of their souls, and that the physical union hampers the union of their souls. This is the reason why I discarded the idea of marriage altogether."

In the "Ark" Mikhail Naimy wrote a large proportion of his

works and articles after his return to the Lebanon. The first work he wrote in his hermitage was the biography of Gibran Khalil Gibran which aroused a great deal of controversy in the Arab world, owing to the novel manner in which he chose to write it. Another book which he wrote in his isolation was The Book of Mirdād, which he considered to represent the climax of his thought. The book was written originally in English and later he translated it into Arabic. He also later translated Gibran's biography into English as well as Mudhakkarāt al-Arqash, which he called Memoirs of a Vagrant Soul and Liqā', which he called Till we meet. Through his writings in English, Mikhail Naimy came to be known outside the Arab world.

At the age of seventy-seven, Mikhail Naimy still leads a simple life in Biskinta up on the mountain in the Lebanon. (24) The change in the world around him, from the flickering gas lamp in the old house in which he was born, to the world of rockets and the dazzling inventions of Man, seems only to confirm his belief that what matters is Man and his soul, and not what he is surrounded with, or what his hands make.

NOTES

1. Quotations in this chapter are all taken from Naimy's autobiography Sabʿūn unless otherwise attributed.
2. Ibn Mālik of Jaén (1273 A.D.) wrote a versified grammar. He was a well-known lexicographer and philologist.
3. Gibb, 1928, 446
4. Malhas, 1964
5. Happold, 1963, 38
6. Tolstoy, 1964, 9
7. The title in Arabic is: fajr al-amal ba'd lail al-yaʾs. The same article was incorporated later in another with the title of "al-Ḥubāḥib." See al-Ghirbāl, 37
8. Mikhail Naimy never had any strong "nationalistic" feelings in the narrow sense of the word. Although he certainly disliked intensely the subjugation of the Arabs by the Turks and later by the French (in his own country), neither his philosophy nor his personal nature ever led him to take strong "nationalistic" stands against the

adversaries of the Arab world, as he believed that no nation was actually capable of ruling another, as long as Man, ruler and ruled, was still the slave of his human ambitions and greed. See Al-Nūr wa'l Daijūr, 97

9. It is important to remember here that Naimy believes that nothing ever happens accidentally. Thus his meeting with his Scottish friend was accordingly predestined.

10. Mikhail Naimy wrote, in a letter addressed to the author, "On page 86 of Sabʿūn (II) you will find some of the moral reasons which made it possible for me to swallow the bitter pill of military service. I may add to them my great shame of claiming exemption on the ground that I was then the subject of a country - Turkey - whose domination over my own country and the rest of the Arab world we all abhorred and fought."

11. Hams al-Jufūn, 80

12. Hams al-Jufūn, 96

13. The members of al-Rābitah were: A. Haddad, N. Haddad, Elias Atallah, W. Catzeflis, N. Aridah, R. Ayoub, G. Gibran and M. Naimy. In April 1920, this group of friends met and decided to form al-Rābitah.

14. Hams al-Jufūn, 97

15. Hams al-Jufūn, 108

16. Published in The New York Times, 30th August, 1930

17. Published in Springfield Republican, 28th October, 1928

18. St. Luke, Chapter 8, v.39

19. Naimy, 1967, 162-163

20. This is the title of an article by Naimy in Zād al-Maʿād, 36-43

21. Mikhail Naimy was first called "The Hermit of al-Shakhrub" by Taufīq ʿAwaḍ, a friend of his who stayed with him there for a short time and wrote a series of articles about Mikhail Naimy following his visit

22. Karm ʿalā Darb, 76

23. St. Matthew, Ch.23, v.II

24. This study was written in 1968, but at the time of publication (December 1983) Naimy is still alive and living in the Lebanon. (Ed)

Chapter 2 THE INFLUENCES ON HIS THOUGHT

"What, have they not journeyed in the land
And have they not hearts to understand with
or ears to hear with."

The Holy Qur'ān, XXII (al-Ḥajj), 46

The keynote in Mikhail Naimy's personality and thought is his deep religious sense. Although born an Orthodox Christian, his Christianity has never been orthodox: in the early stages of his life and before going to Russia, he accepted without question the teachings of the Church. But, after his return from Russia, he started to ask "How is it that Christ should be the "only" Son of God, and that I should not be so, when Christ calls me his brother, and teaches me to call His Father my Father?" This, and many other similar questions, preoccupied his inquisitive mind, and he seemed ultimately to reject the established teachings of the Church, while clinging to the example of Christ and his sublime teachings. However, his questioning of the teachings of the Church did not lead him to reject the divinity of Christ. In his memoirs while in Russia, he wrote "I have read "Vie de Jesus" by Renan. It seems to me that the writer who tried to deprive Christ of the quality of divinity, ended by makng him Divine, when he placed him in such a position of perfection as no human being could ever attain to. His silence with respect to Christ's miracles is evidence that he does not understand them, or that he is unable to explain them. The Bible was - and still is - my only consolation. It will always be so." Moreover, he thinks that Christians have deserted the teachings of the Christ who says, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who persecute and insult you"(1). To Mikhail Naimy, love is the only way that leads to true understanding, "for understanding is the way to freedom - or to Salvation." He often emphasises that,if we turn our minds whole-heartedly to the good which we seek, we are bound to attain it, and thus to fulfil Christ's promise, "Ask and the gift will come; seek, and you shall find; knock and the door shall be opened to you. Everyone

that asks, will receive; everyone that seeks will find; everyone that knocks, will have the door opened for him"(2).

This idea is implied in his short story entitled "A Birth" (mīlād jadīd) (Abū Baṭṭah, pp. 174-181). A paralysed young boy is told by his mother to pray to Christ whole-heartedly on Christmas Eve to cure him, which He does. A thief gets into the boy's room, whom he takes to be Christ coming to cure him. The boy prays to the thief to cure him. Feeling pity for the boy, the thief takes the boy by the hand and asks him to walk. The miracle happens as the bells of Bethlehem ring. This story and several others reflect the extent to which Mikhail is influenced by the teachings of Christ. It is clear here that he has in mind the teaching that, if we have true faith, then we will be able to do wonders.

In "The Face of Jesus" (3), an article in which Mikhail Naimy imagines himself a witness of the crucifixion, one feels the deep love that he has for Christ: here he presents to us a picture of the crowds, swayed by the sight of blood and pain, spitting on the face of Jesus, and pouring bitterness into the heart of the One who had nothing but love for their weakness. Human beings are presented to us with all the conflicting desires which overwhelm them. On the other hand, Naimy draws an impressive picture of the tortured Jesus, bearing with patience and forgiveness all the pain and humiliation inflicted on him. Mikhail Naimy with his great artistic ability, coupled with his deep love and reverence for Christ, makes the words of Christ, "O Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" reflect impressively the sharp contrast between the human and the Divine. "That is the face in which I take refuge from the faces of human beings."

In al-Marāḥil, Mikhail Naimy expounds his own interpretation of some of Christ's teachings: to him "The Kingdom of God" is a spiritual state attained by those whose souls are freed from the bonds of matter: this is what Christ meant when he said to his disciples "The Kingdom of God is here within you"(4). The immense influence which the teachings of Christ had on him is clearly reflected in his frequent repetition of Christ's sayings: "If a man strikes thee on thy right cheek, turn the other cheek towards him", "Love your enemies", "Do not resist evil." Thus

the element of love, which forms an essential part of the teachings of Christ in whom Naimy ardently believed, despite the questions which his rational mind raised, came to mould the essence of his thought and philosophy. Here love, that over-worked and often abused word, seems to have taken on a mystical connotation in Naimy's contemplation, a trend which is not alien to Orthodox Christianity (5). Hence studying Naimy's works one is constantly aware of the tremendous impact of this Christian element of love, which takes an almost mystical form, in formulating his thought in his attempts to fathom the eternal problems of being, and the meaning of life.

It may be of interest to compare the mystical experience which Mikhail Naimy relates in his autobiography with that of Richard Jefferies (1848-1887). Jefferies, the son of a Wiltshire farmer, won a reputation as a writer who combined a remarkable power of observation of nature with a deep poetical and philosophical insight. He is of particular interest, as he was, like Mikhail Naimy, a man "in whom mystical consciousness was very highly developed, but who could not find within the religious thought patterns with which he was familiar satisfactory answers to the questions which his mystical consciousness posed for him. Such answers as he was able to find he found solely through the contemplations of nature and of his own soul. There is in him a combination of nature-mysticism and soul-mysticism of a unique kind, springing out of a purely personal vision, which, since the material was not available to him, he had no means of interpreting and expressing, except in concepts which he had to invent for himself"(6).

In the following extract from Richard Jefferies' book The Story of my Heart, he describes an experience which he underwent, very similar to the experience described by Mikhail Naimy in his autobiography. Jefferies wrote in Chapter 1 of this book

"With all the intensity of feeling which exalted me, all the intense communion I held with the earth, the sun and sky, the stars hidden by light, with the ocean - in no manner can the thrilling depth of these feelings be written - with these I prayed, as if they were the keys of an instrument, of an organ, with which I swelled forth the notes of my soul, redoubling my

own voice by their power. The great sun burning with light; the strong earth, dear earth, the warm sky; the pure air; the thought of ocean; the inexpressible beauty of all filled me with a rapture, an ecstasy, an inflatus. With this inflatus, too, I prayed. Next to myself I came and recalled myself, my bodily existence. I held out my hand, the sunlight gleamed on the skin and the irridescent nails; I recalled the mystery and the beauty of the flesh. I thought of the mind with which I could see the ocean sixty miles distant, and gather to myself its glory. I thought of my inner existence, that consciousness which is called the soul. These, that is, myself - I threw into the balance to weigh the prayer the heavier. My strength of body, mind and soul, I flung into it; I put forth my strength; I wrestled and laboured, and toiled in might of prayer. The prayer, this soul-emotion was in itself - not for an object - it was a passion. I hid my face in the grass, I was wholly prostrated, I lost myself in the wrestle, and I was rapt and carried away.

Becoming calmer, I returned to myself and thought, reclining in rapt thought, full of aspiration, steeped to the lips of my soul in desire. I did not then define, or analyse, or understand this. I see now that what I laboured for was soul-life, more soul-nature, to be exalted, to be full of soul-learning. Finally I rose, walked half a mile or so along the summit of the hill eastwards, to soothe myself and come to the common ways of life again. Had any shepherd accidently seen me lying on the turf, he would only have thought that I was resting a few minutes; I made no outward show. Who could have imagined the whirlwind of passion that was going on within me as I reclined there. I was greatly exhausted when I reached home. Occasionally I went upon the hill deliberately, deeming it good to do so; then, again, this craving carried me away up there of itself. Though the principal feeling was the same, there were variations in the mode in which it affected me." Here we have the experience of a man living in a different environment from that of Naimy's, and at a different time, expressing, in a strikingly similar manner, the yearnings of Man's soul and feelings. That Jefferies' description of his experience, like that of Naimy's is vague, is indisputable. Nevertheless, they appear to be genuine attempts to convey certain intimations of "something more than existence"

which both Jefferies and Naimy seem to have experienced. If they only succeed in making us realise that Man has not yet brought into play anything like the power of which he is capable, and which forms the core of his spiritual life, then both descriptions will have achieved their purpose. Has not Wordsworth, that great lover of nature, expressed certain intimations, "shadowy recollections" which

> "Be they what they may,
> Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
> Are yet the master-light of all our seeing."

Apart from the Christian element which forms the basis of Naimy's trend of thought and which takes a mystical-humanitarian form, we find that his wide knowledge of Buddhism constitutes another factor which moulds his ideas. However, his great interest in Buddhism is firmly linked with his basic idealistic Christian outlook on life: in Christianity the idea of Original Sin tends to drive the ardent believer to struggle in order to achieve salvation. Likewise, Buddha taught that life on this earth is a series of desires, ambitions and greeds that lead Man from birth to death, and from death to birth. It is only by attaining Nirvana that Man is able to rid himself of the fetters of matter which bind him to this earth. The core of Buddha's preaching is that there is a way, a path, whereby desire, which is the root of suffering, could be overcome. This fundamental Buddhist belief - which meets the Christian outlook - seems to lie behind Naimy's admiration for Buddhism. (7) Thus in al-Marāḥil, Mikhail Naimy takes the "Face of Buddha" as one of the three faces that in his view "dwarf the faces of all other human beings." Together with the face of Buddha, and that of Christ, the face of Laotse is the third to which Mikhail Naimy turns. To him, Laotse is "the angel of peace, the messenger of gentleheartedness, the paragon of virtue and contentment." The idea of the Tao which Laotse propagates, is concerned with emancipating Man from his earthly bonds, which probably explains its appeal to Mikhail Naimy.(9) Thus, the ideas of Salvation, Nirvana, the Tao, which all lead, in different ways, to the freeing of the human soul from its bonds, played their part in moulding Naimy's

general trend of thought although it is basically Christian. It is perhaps true to say that the life and teachings of Christ, Buddha (10) and Laotse, though they vary in detail, have one thing in common, which seems to have had the greatest impact on Mikhail Naimy's thought; this is that desire is the worst sin, that discontent is the worst misery, and that possessiveness is the worst human trait. Consequently, the climax of happiness will only be found in contentment.

Together with Buddhism, Hinduism seems also to have influenced him, since certain aspects of it seem to have appealed to his innate religious sense. His views on Man and his place in the Universe, life and death, good and evil, all seem to have been influenced by his readings of the Bhagavad Gita (11) and Raja Yoga, a work by Vivekananda, the Indian mystic. In the Gita, the idea of the emancipation of the human soul from the bondage of matter is prominent; so is the idea of contentment and rejection of wordly pleasures.

To Mikhail Naimy, the fundamentals in the teachings of Christ and those of Hinduism are the same, for both exhort Man to restrain his selfishness in order to attain Union with God in Christianity, and Oneness with Brahman in Hinduism. Both faiths enjoin overcoming evil with forgiveness, and abstaining from inflicting pain, a creed which is called Ahimsha by the Hindus.

While a student at the University of Washington, Naimy became interested, through a friend, in the idea of the transmigration of souls or Metempsychosis. This led him to read about the subject and he soon came to believe in it. It replaced in his mind the idea of Original Sin and the Day of Judgement and, having adopted this idea he has since come to believe that Man attains his own redemption by his own efforts, through experience which leads him to knowledge. Since knowledge is unattainable in one life, the doctrine of Metempsychosis makes of life a continuous movement, interrupted only by the transmigration of the soul from one body to another. These interruptions are, according to this doctrine, what we call death. In his biography of Gibran, we observe that the idea of the transmigration of souls is there; for on the night of Gibran's birth in the Lebanon, Mary Haskell in America, who was then ten years old, is made to dream of Gibran's birth.

Mikhail Naimy believes that the ancient Egyptians believed in the immortality of the human soul (12) and that they considered death as a migration from one coast of life to another. Ancient Egyptian beliefs in this respect and the myth of the Phoenix which used to live for centuries in the Arabian desert, then burnt itself, only to rise from the ashes with renewed vigour to live through another cycle, seem to have captured his imagination.(13) He mentions that the Arabs invented the myth of al-ʿanqāʾ, the Persians that of the Simörg, the Indians Gharūda, the Japanese the Hu Oo. However, these different myths seems to have enhanced Naimy's belief in the doctrine of the transmigration of souls. In al-Yaum al-Akhīr, Gibran Khalil Gibran, and Liqāʾ, his belief in this doctrine forms the essence of the work. That Science does not approve of this doctrine does not concern him, for he maintains that Science has not yet unravelled the mysteries of human life. What also appeals to Naimy in this doctrine is that it puts an end to the fear of death, making it subservient to life. Moreover, it restores to "justice" "right" and "life" their true meanings; for believing in this doctrine one has to accept the idea that whatever pleasure or pain one feels is the outcome of one's own work, whether in this life or in previous lives.

A Christian Arab thinker or writer is bound by racial and linguistic considerations to have a close understanding of Islam, and Mikhail Naimy is no exception. Is not the language which he loves, and of which he is a master, that of the Qurʾān? However, Naimy seems here to be faced with a dilemma: unable to condone the use of force which Islam justifies in certain cases, out of a genuine aversion to bloodshed whatever the cause may be, he seems to belittle "the glories brought about by the swords of the Khālid b. al-Walīd, ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀs, and Ṭāriq b. Ziyād, and to think of the Arab conquests as no more than "the froth that the Arabs aroused in their outburst from the Arab Peninsula."(14) In his view, the great Miracle of the Arabs is the Qurʾān, for that was the miracle which established for the Arabs and non-Arabs an aim in life. Moreover, it proved to them, through the life of the Prophet and his Companions, that it was possible to attain that aim, for the life of the Prophet and early Caliphs is full of precepts to be followed. Mikhail Naimy expresses his

admiration for the nobility of the Prophet's character, but remains silent about the Prophet as a statesman and as a leader. The Prophet is not one of the "Three Faces"" (those of Buddha, Laotse and Christ) to which he turns, and which he considers "dwarf the faces of all other human beings." But if the Prophet, not unnaturally, is not one of his champions in the history of Man, we find him expressing his admiration for the great mystics and thinkers of Islam: Ibn al-Fārid,(15) al-Ḥallāj,(16) Ibn al-ʿArabī(17) and Abū al-ʿAlā(18) It is the free thinker rather than the dogmatist in Islam who leaves his mark on Mikhail Naimy. Much as he admires the great thinkers, writers and philosphers of medieval Islam,(19) he is a modernist and a revolutionary who wages war against traditionalism in the literature of his time. This revolution against the stagnation of modern Arabic literature was the result of his wide reading in Western literature, especially Russian and Anglo-Saxon. Western methods of criticism and concepts of the meaning of literature left a deep impression on his thinking which can be seen clearly in al-Ghirbāl, his main work on literary criticism. It is important to remember here that, although Mikhail Naimy is one of the pioneers of modern Arabic literature who introduced Western concepts and methods of criticism, he never aimed at severing relations with the past. In the constitution of al-Rābitah, of which he was the author, he stated, "Yet do we not aim to break away completely from the ancients. For there be some among them who will remain a source of inspiration to us and to those who follow for many ages to come. To revere them is a great honour. To imitate them is a deadly shame. For our life, our needs, our circumstances are different from theirs. We must be true to ourselves if we would be true to our ancestors . . ." (20)

Mikhail Naimy's life, both in Russia and the United States had a tremendous impact on his thought. In Russia, he came to know the country and its people so well that he felt almost a native of that land. Before long, he mastered tyhe Russian language and could speak and write it with ease. The history of the country, the traditions of its people, all became familiar to him. He read extensively the great masters of Russian literature and, through the stories of Gogol, he learned about the native and simple life of the Russian peasant, his patience, good-

heartedness and love for his land, just as he learned about the greed and cruelty of the land-lords who exploited him. The poetry of Pushkin, Lermontov, and others made him feel the deep melancholy and sadness in the Russian character. The hopes and aspirations of the Russians for a better life, free from injustice and tyranny as expressed by Dostoyevsky, impressed him immensely but, much as he enjoyed reading the various writers and poets of Russian literature, Tolstoy was the one he admired most. For in him he saw the writer and philospher who delved deeply into the meaning of life and death, a subject which had always preoccupied him. Critics like Belinsky moulded his ideas about the value of a literary work and the role of the writer in society, and all of them, not to mention Gorky and Chekhov whom he admired, opened up a new world for him as regards the meaning of literature. Moreover, he became aware of the stagnation and insignificance of contemporary Arabic literature, where writers and poets vied with each other in playing with words, flowery phrases and rhymed prose. In Russia were planted the seeds of rebellion against the outmoded concepts of contemporary Arabic literature. His admiration for Russian literature and the affection which he felt towards the Russians became salient features affecting his thought and personality. (21)

If Russia, the Russians and Russian literature revealed a new world for Mikhail Naimy, his life in the United States defined the course his thought was to take later on; for here he found himself face to face with modern Western civilisation and it is because he came into close contact with that civilisation that he was compelled to define his attitude towards it. From the outset, it is noticeable that Mikhail Naimy found it difficult to become a member of the new society he had come to live in. In Russia the old, established, traditional, Orthodox Christian society made the process of adapting himself to that society easy for him, while the new adventurous, experimental, multiracial society in America, which, on the whole, looked upon the problems of life as practical problems, made him critical of it. This was not unnatural in a young university student whose own mind was entirely absorbed by the baffling questions of what life meant, while most of his colleagues' interests revolved around baseball, football, or some other sport. The contrast

between his feelings at the Seminary in Poltava and his feelings as a university student in America is very sharp: in Russia he felt very close to other students, while in America, he never felt any attachment to the university. (22) This feeling of detachment from his environment seems to have accompanied him throughout his stay in the United States. For there, he felt that Science, which formed the basis of the civilisation with which he came into contact, was not a sufficient guide for Man in his struggle to understand the meaning and aims of life. Science relies entirely on the mind, and Mikhail Naimy's innate religious sense rebelled against the idea that our lives can be governed entirely by our minds. Moreover, he rebelled against the tendency of Western civilisation to engross Man in his immediate and material needs, when he felt deeply that there must be more to Man's life than the satisfaction of his desires. However, this does not mean that he adopted a passive attitude towards Western civilisation and culture; for, as he devoured Russian literature when he was in Poltava, he read everything he could lay his hands upon in the United States, until he came to be as familiar with Anglo-Saxon literature as he was with Russian. If, however, Mikhail Naimy objected to the interference of machines in Man's life in Western society, he was aware of the vitality of Anglo-Saxon literature, which led him to compare it with the stagnant modern Arabic literature, as had also been the case when he read Russian literature. The rebellion, which began in Russia, against the literary life of the Arabs grew during his stay in America, the more so as there was a large and active Arab community in that country. His closeness to Arab writers and poets in America, who shared with him the same concepts of literature, and with whom he founded al-Rābitah, gave him the chance to play a leading role in the war against the stagnant Arabic literature of the time. The more Mikhail Naimy immersed himself in English literature, the more rebellious he became against the concept of literature in the Arab world and the more conscious of the need to revolutionize it.

NOTES

1. St. Matthew, Ch.5, V.44
2. St. Matthew, Ch.7, V.7-8
3. Al-Marāḥil, 28
4. St. Luke, Ch.17, V.21
   Mikhail Naimy's preoccupation with Man's spiritual needs and his ardent belief that these should be given priority over any other needs is basically the result of the influence of the Holy Bible on his trend of thinking
5. Spencer, 1963, 226, writes " . . . but again and again Eastern saints have felt themselves to be transfigured by the divine light which shone through Jesus. As Berdyaev has said: "The idea of the divinization of man is the fundamental concept of Orthodox Christianity"
6. Happold, 1963, 353
7. If the idea of salvation in Christianity is taken to mean the deliverance of Man's soul from evil, one could see that it would not be difficult for a Christian who believes in the necessity of seeking salvation to accept the Buddhist ideas concerning Nirvana, which is essentially a state in which Man rids himself of his worldly desires and cleans himself of sin. Burt, 1955, Ch.1.,
8. This is the sub-title of three articles in al-Marāḥil entitled "Three Faces" which include "The Face of Buddha", "The Face of Laotse", and "The Face of Christ." See al-Marāḥil, 7-53
9. It is not within the scope of this study to go into the details of the complex idea of the Tao. It is sufficient to mention here that a poem in The Book of Tao by Laotse (see Yutang, 1955a, 41) seems to define the Tao as "the spirit out of which all spirits emanate." The idea, however, is shrouded with mystery
10. The teachings of Buddha concerning forgiveness seem to be very similar to the teachings of Christ in this respect. Mikhail Naimy's great admiration for the teachings of Buddha seems accordingly to stem from their appeal, in certain respects, to his fundamental belief in the teachings of Christ. In The Sermon of Abuse (see Yutang,

1955b, 473) Buddha says: "If a man foolishly does me wrong, I will return to him the protection of my ungrudging love", which sounds strikingly similar to Christ's commandment: "If a man strikes thee on thy right cheek, turn the other cheek towards him"

11. The Blessed Lord's Song (see Yutang, 1955b, 115) contains the essence of one of Mikhail Naimy's ideas. Mikhail Naimy's tendency to "select" from other faiths what appeals to his profound belief in the teachings of Christ is evident here also

12. The Book of the Dead is an ancient Egyptian work, which goes back forty centuries before the birth of Christ and which contains articles on the inner self, philosophy and poetry. These articles indicate that the ancient Egyptians believed in the immortality of the human soul

13. Anecdota Syriaca is a latin work which tells about the myth of the Phoenix

14. Fī Mahabb al-Rīḥ, 22. Mikhail Naimy tends to think here of these great figures in the history of the Arabs merely as military leaders. Is it possible, one wonders, to draw a line between their military achievements and their idealistic belief in Islam? Surely, the idealistic element in their characters must have played an important role in bringing about their military success

15. Sharaf al-Dīn ʿUmar Ibn al-Fāriḍ, the famous Arab mystic was born and died in Cairo (1181-1235 A.D.) His mystical poetry is characterised by the glow and exquisite beauty of its diction

16. Ḥusain b. Mansūr al-Ḥallāj, the great Arab mystic was executed during the Caliphate of Muqtadir (922 A.D.) Alfred Guillaume, 1956, 145 has this to say about him: "He taught that Man was God incarnate, and he looked to Jesus rather than to Muhammad as the supreme example of glorified humanity"

17. Muḥyi al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ʿAlī Ibn al-ʿArabī was born at Murcia in Spain in 1165 A.D. He travelled to the East where he stayed for a long time in the Hijaz, then settled in Damascus, where he died in the year 1240 A.D.

18. On Abū al-ʿAlā' see p.13 Ch.1 of this study

19. Despite this admiration, Mikhail Naimy states in al-Ghirbāl that "It would be unfair to put any of them on the same footing with Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, Hugo, Zola, Goethe and Tolstoy"

20. Gibran Khalil Gibran, English edition, 156

21. It seems that the idealism of Russian writers appealed to the idealistic trait in Mikhail Naimy's personality. In al-Nūr wa'l-Daijūr 66, he states, "In Russian literature the number of idealistic writers is unparalleled, although their idealism was often shattered on the rocks of hard reality." In this respect, the idealism of Mihail Naimy in the Arab World is, in a sense, similar to the idealism of the Russian writers of the last century, in that it often sounds an unheeded cry in the wilderness

22. In his autobiography - Sabʿūn, II, 27 - Mikhail Naimy describes how he was repelled by the atmosphere of joviality which prevailed at the University of Washington where he studied. "That great interest in baseball, football and other sports was extremely repulsive to me; for it was incompatible with my earnest attitude towards everything. Boyhood, I felt, was the time for merriment, while youth was the time when we should try to fathom the meaning of existence. It may be that I felt older than I was, and perhaps my American companions were right in extending the days of boyhood to embrace their university life"

"God is the Light of the heavens and the Earth;
the likeness of His Lights is as a niche
Wherein is a lamp
(the lamp in a glass,
the glass as it were a glittering star)
Kindled from a Blessed Tree,
an olive that is neither of the East nor of the West;
Whose oil well nigh would shine, even if no fire
touched it;
Light upon Light,
God guides to His Light whom he will."
(The Holy Qur'ān, XXIV. (Light), 35.)

"My son! There is nothing in this world, that is not God
He is action, purity, everlasting spirit.
Find him in the Cavern; gnaw the knot of ignorance.
Shining, yet hidden, Spirit lives in the cavern.
Everything that sways, breathes, opens, closes, lives
in Spirit; beyond learning, better than anything;
living, unliving.
It is the undying blazing spirit, that seed of all
seeds, wherein lay hidden the world and all its
creatures. It is life, speech, mind, reality,
immortality."
(From the Mundaka-Unpanishad.)

"There is a spirit in the soul, untouched by time and
flesh, flowing from the Spirit, remaining in the
Spirit, itself wholly spiritual. In this principle is
God, ever verdant, ever flowering in all the joy and
glory of His actual Self. Sometimes I have called this
principle the Tabernacle of the Soul, sometimes a
spiritual Light, anon I say it is a spark. But now I
say that it is more exalted over this and that than the
heavens are exalted above the earth. So now I name it
in a nobler fashion . . . It is free of all names and
void of all forms. It is one and simple, as God is one

and simple, and no man in any wise behold it."
(Eckhart.)

"The Power which controls the Universe" - is one of the main themes which Mikhail Naimy deals with in his writings. As an Orthodox Christian thinker with fervent religious feelings who rebels against the established teachings of the Church, either as a result of his own rethinking of what he had been taught, or as a result of his own readings and personal experience, it is not unnatural that he should try to seek a philosophy which would satisfy his innate religious nature. When he writes about this Power, he seems deliberately to avoid using any conventional terms which might lead the reader to think that he is "talking to him about a God whose primary purpose is to watch over every movement, thought or desire of human beings, in order that he may reward the good amongst them with the joy of Paradise, and punish the bad with the fire of Hell." But, since he finds it necessary to use a specific term which indicates this Power, he calls it the "Cosmic Order" "al-niẓām al-kaunī". Naimy's concept of this Order is based on a deductive method of reasoning and observation: "To know with certainty that a young boy will some day grow to be a man, or that the sun will rise tomorrow as it did today, or that a seed sown in the autumn will grow to be a grain in the spring, all this must lead one to realise that one lives in a world controlled by an Order".(1) Accordingly, he believes that whatever we do, think or desire is the outcome of our conformity with this Order of which we, and the things around us, form a part. Thus, it is our duty to seek to know this Order, so that we may obey it out of understanding and contentment, a course which will save us from misery and be a source of strength and tranquility to us. All our faiths, philosophies, sciences and arts are no more than our attempts to fathom the mysteries of this Order; to unveil its secrets, so that we may be able to avoid committing the mistakes which are made as a result of our ignorance of this Order, or of our intransigence. These faults or mistakes which we commit are labelled our "sins" in holy books, but we are not to blame if we commit them, for we are bound to do so, just as a child is bound to fall before he learns to walk properly. The mistake we should never make is to

repudiate the existence of the Cosmic Order, or to imagine that we have full control over our lives and destinies and that we are capable of moulding them according to our own wishes.(2)

Man's aim in life, according to Mikhail Naimy, should be to seek a better knowledge of the Cosmic Order, for it is only through our knowledge of the Order that we will become perfect. The Order itself has provided us with the means through which we will be able to come to know it. These are our analytical mind (al-ʿaql), our inner feelings (al-wajdāt), which have been able to set the standards for our moral and aesthetic values, and our insight (al-khayāl), which is able to carry us beyond the boundaries within which the mind is confined. Although the Order endowed Man with these forces, very few individuals (3) were able to use them to unveil the mysteries of the Order of which life is a part. These same forces are abused by the majority of human beings, who often use them to their own destruction.

Mikhail Naimy's ideas about what he calls the Cosmic Order are founded not only on his deductive reasoning but also on his meditations: "For I have a deep feeling that my inner world, and the world around me, are organized in a most astounding manner, and that there is nothing in this universe but succumbs to its organization, whether in respect of its creation, movement, growth or decay." In one of his meditations on the subject, he is led to believe that this Order is nothing other than the Eternal Mind; the Whole, the Perfect, the Comprehensive, out of which his own mind, and the mind of every human being emanates. The instinct of every plant, insect or animal, the particles of all bodies, all emanate from this Eternal Mind. As his own mind (or that of Man), emanates from the Eternal Mind, it follows that it does not differ from it "except in as far as the seed differs from the tree from which it comes, or as a child differs from his parents, or the stream from the sea. The seed, if planted in a congenial environment, will develop into a tree, the child will develop into a man or a woman, and the stream into a lake or a sea. Likewise, my mind, given the congenial environment, which is Time, will develop until it becomes whole, comprehensive, and perfect like the Eternal Mind from which it emanated." (4) In his work Mikhail Naimy, an Introduction, Nadeem Naimy summarises his doctrine of the Cosmic Law by saying" . . . The gist of this

theory, a combination of Taoism, Buddhism, Platonism and Christianity, all moulded within an overall theosophic framework, is that all the world of contingent existence is a manifestation of an all-pervading World Soul of transcendental reality, or God, conceivable only through inner vision; that the human soul is an eternal spark of God entrapped by the lower world of spatio-temporal phenomena; and that the meaning of life is to realise one's divine origin and, through spiritual sublimation and self-negation, which may continue over several life-times, to break loose from one's earthly bondage and finally reunite with the absolute."

As a result of his belief in the Cosmic Order, Mikhail Naimy came to believe that nothing ever happens accidentally or by chance within the realm of the Order, which encompasses everything: for, as it is an "Order" that controls the universe, things that happen to us never do so haphazardly, but their occurrence always has a purpose and a motive. Man's happiness or misery depends on the extent to which he is able to adapt his thinking so as to be congruous and in full harmony with what Mikhail Naimy calls "the Oneness of life which is all-comprehensive." Man should make the will of life his own will, but if he is unable to understand the wisdom behind some aspects of life within the Order - birth and death, joy and pain, the phenomena of growth and decay - this will not remain beyond his comprehension forever. For the Cosmic Order provides Man with the experiences which are bound to widen the horizon of his comprehension. Even these very aspects of life which he is unable to understand now, will come to be understood by the experience of going through them. The very fact that Man has a tremendous yearning to unravel the mysteries of the Order is in itself an indication that the Order exists. For this yearning is similar to the feeling of hunger - its mere existence is an indication that food must exist.

This belief in the existence of the Cosmic Order, leads Mikhail Naimy to another belief: that Man's illusory ego, or Man's shadow, will ultimately merge with the Universal Spirit where all egos will melt in the One, the Absolute. It is then that Man's shadow or his ego will attain the tranquillity of being united with the universe around him of which he in fact

forms an integral part. In fact, Naimy uses the very word (al-ṭuma'nīnah) - Tranquillity - as the title of a poem to express this belief in the close attachment between Man's shadow or his illusory ego with the Universal Spirit. This will achieve for Man the serenity which he has been struggling for since time immemorial:

My house is wrought of steel,
My house is built on stone:
Blow, winds, if so ye will,
And O ye trees, make moan,
Swim in the skies, O cloud,
And let your torrents fall,
Crash, thunders, long and loud;
No terrors me appal -
My roof is wrought of steel,
My house is built on stone.

My candle's little light
Is all I need, to see:
However long the night
And wide the shadows be,
What though the dawn may die
And day be plain too soon,
Stars, vanish from the sky,
Put out thy flame, O moon -
My candle's little light
Is all I need to see.

Whatever may befall,
My heart is fortified:
Assail me, troubles all,
At dawn and eventide,
Misfortunes, march you on
With misery and pain,
Bring your battalion
Ye plagues of mortal men -
Whatever may befall,
My heart is fortified.

Fortune has ta'en my part
And Fate is mine ally:
Ye evils, round my heart
Now let your lightnings fly!
Death dig your trenches here
And let your traps be laid,
No injury I fear,
No punishment I dread –
Fortune has ta'en my part
And Fate is my ally.
(translation by A.J. Arberry)

It would appear that, when using the word "nafs", Naimy does not mean by it the phenomenal, transient self of Man, but the greater self, the changeless, the immortal. It may be that he is influenced here again by the Hindu conception of "Self." (5) For in "Tranquillity" the poet seems to assure us that the misery and unhappiness of Man lie in his mistaken belief that there exist two worlds: the world of good, and the world of evil, and that there exists more than one "dhāt" "Essential Self" in these two worlds, when in fact there is only one world with one "Self." Elaborating on this point Naimy writes:

"This sensory world in which we live is a space-time conditioned world and, therefore, a dual world in which everything is in a constant flux of change. Yet behind this change and through it is a Constancy which never changes. It is the Power that makes for change. That Constancy or that Power is the Ultimate Reality which is beyond time and space, beyond good and evil, and beyond all dualities: the world of appearance being nothing more than a crude shadow thereof. Yet this shadow seems to be governed by a rigid Law in its shiftings and transformations. This Law is designed to lead intelligent beings like Man to the Higher Law which is the Law of Absolute Being which is unconditioned by any restrictions, like the peak of a capstone of a pyramid which is no longer bound by the bulk of the pyramid. Man's growth, therefore, is not one of bulk, of accumulation, of accretion; but one of self-denuding, self-unburdening and self-effacing in the Greater Self or the Only

Self. This, of course, is not meant for the huge masses of mankind who are still very low in the scale of spiritual evolution. It is meant for those who have come to feel the need for self-emancipation or self-realization." (6)

The idea that Man is in fact an integral part of the universe, forming with it one unit is expressed in an article which he entitles "The Raven's Sermon." (7) The raven here gives a sermon while standing on the dead body of the author, the theme of which is the folly of Man since he made himself his own enemy by detaching himself from the world around him. "Thus he came to say 'I' - and 'the World'." By doing this, Man started to see things with two different eyes: with the one he saw "I", while with the other he saw "the not-I", and thus he came to be divided against himself. The raven ends his sermon by saying that it is only when Man comes to mean one thing by the "World" and "I" that he will become united in himself again.

The idea that Man should strive to see himself as part of the universe permeates the writings of Mikhail Naimy. Man's will he maintains, should come to be harmonious with that of The Omniwill. He elucidates this point by saying that "Behind what I call "The Cosmic Order or Law" is the "Cosmic Will" which in my book Book of Mirdād is called the "Omniwill." It is the will of the Ominwill, or the Cosmic Will, that Man should know it in order to realise his being in full. To know it Man must have his own will. By opposing his will to the Omniwill, Man comes to realise the importance of his will against the omnipotence of the Omniwill; then he knowingly surrenders his will and accepts the Omniwill as his own will. That is the ultimate purpose of the life of Man." (8)

Any study of Naimy's thought is bound to give prominence to the work entitled The Book of Mirdād, as he himself considers it to be the climax of his philosophy. Not surprisingly, the reader of this work is immediately struck by its Biblical atmosphere. Indeed it is the story of Noah's Ark and the Flood that forms the main source of inspiration behind it. Here we have Man, as represented by Noah's family, wavering between pious belief and utter godlessness, uncontrolled desires and pure chastity. Mikhail Naimy's innate religious nature, basically Christian but

devoid of any traces of dogmatism, seems at last to express itself in the words of Mirdād, who would appear to be the embodiment of Naimy's concept of a prophet. The almost Biblical tone is strikingly noticeable in every word uttered by Mirdad:

"Remember that the Key to life is the Creative Word. The key to the Creative Word is Love. The key to Love is Understanding. Fill up your hearts with these and spare your tongues the pain of many words, and save your minds the weight of many prayers, and free your hearts of bondage to all gods who would enslave you with a gift; who would caress you with one hand only to smite you with the other; who are content and kindly when you praise them, but wrathful and revengeful when reproached; who would not hear you save you call, and would not give to you save you beg, and having given to you, too oft regret the giving; whose incense is your tear; whose glory is your shame. Aye, free your hearts of all these gods that you may find in them the only God, who, having filled you with himself, would have you ever full."

The tone in this quotation, as in so many others in The Book of Mirdād is unquestionably Christian, yet unequivocally unorthodox. It is in such quotations that we come face to face with Naimy, whose spirit is fundamentally and fervently Christian, but who evolved for himself a brand of Christianity which rejects the idea of punishment and reward. This unorthodox Christianity dispenses even with prayers, for "You need no lip or tongue for praying. But rather do you need a silent, wakeful heart, a Master-Wish, a Master-Thought, and above all, a Master-Will that neither doubts nor hesitates. For words are of no avail except the heart be present and awake in every syllable. And, when the heart is present and awake, the tongue had better go to sleep, or hide behind sealed lips."

In the same work, we can also detect Mikhail Naimy's belief that Man and the universe are inseparable, and that he and Nature around him form a close unit, for "In Life and in death; on Earth as beyond the Earth, you never are alone, but in constant company of things and beings which have their share in your life and death, as you have yours in their life and death. As you partake

of them, so they partake of you; and as you seek them, so they seek you." But if Man and Nature are inseparable, God and Man are equally inseparable, for "Man is a god in swaddling-bands." These bands are Time, Space and Flesh, of which he is striving to rid himself.

Once Man casts away from his "I" these swaddling-bands and barriers, he will see it "eternally at peace with itself and all the worlds that issue out of it." Mirdad, or Mikhail Naimy, assures us that Man "Shall go into the forge a man but shall emerge a god." The idea is repeated in Zād al-Maʿād, when Naimy says: "For as long as you are separated from anything or anybody, you will remain separated from God as He exists in that thing or that person. Love is your bridge which carried you to those whom you love and to things you love. Thus, the more bridges you extend from your hearts to people, the closer you come to your true selves, and so to God who dwells within you. But the wider and the more gaps that separate you from others the longer is your estrangement from yourselves and thus from God, away from whom no self can be yours."

The god in whom Mikhail Naimy believes is above inflicting punishment or giving reward. He is in no need of praise, and not affected by blasphemy:

> La-hum khāliqun yazdadu bi'l-shukri rifatan
> Wa-bi'l-dhammi yahwī min ʿulāhu wa-yunqiṣu
> Fa-rabbun idhā majjadtahu iʿtazza wa-ʾrtadā
> La-rabbun idhā zammarta lā shakka yarqusu
> (They have a god who grows more sublime when thanked
> And when defamed falls down from his exalted heights
> and is diminished
> A god like that, proud and contented
> when glorified
> Is a god who will dance, undoubtedly,
> If you play a tune). (9)

In an attempt to explain to us his image of God, Mikhail Naimy maintains that his belief in Him is interdependent with his belief in Man: "I say to you, there is not God and Man. But there is God-Man or Man-God. There is the One. However

However multiplied, however divided, it is forever One." (10) He very often stressed the point that his belief in God and his belief in Man are but one and the same thing. He writes, "Had it not been for my belief in God, I would not have believed in Man. Likewise, had it not been for my belief in Man I would not have believed in God. For both beliefs stem from one source. In fact they are one."

For Mikhail Naimy, this belief in God-Man is an act of faith, which is enhanced by his observations, meditations and deductive reasoning. He tells us that what led him to God was God himself, not what he read about Him in Sacred and secular books, and that what led him to believe in Man was Man himself, not what he came to know of his history, sciences, and arts. Moreover, he maintains that it is futile to claim that we believe in God before he is revealed to us in Man, as it is futile to try to understand Man before we can see him in God. He goes on to explain that it is no use pursuing either aim before our vision is freed from every chain which would enable it to see the Creator in the created, and the created in the Creator. (11) The idea of the unity of Man and God is the theme of Memoirs of a Vagrant Soul, a book in which the writer expounds his ideas about the majestic qualities of this unity and how people are inattentive to it, while preoccupied with the trivialities of life. In fact, The Vagrant Soul (al-Arqash - the Pitted Face) reflects in his diaries the fierce conflict which was raging in Naimy's inner soul while he was in New York between his genuine and deep desire to lift himself to a state of mystical perfection akin to that of Christ and Buddha, and the flesh which kept binding him to the worldly needs of this earth.

In his attempts to present to the reader his own conception of God, Mikhail Naimy often seems to negate the orthodox and conventional ideas about Him. He tells us that he used to glorify with others the God who gave life and took it, who punished and rewarded, but that he no longer believes in that God, for the God he now believes in is above life and death, and loftier than punishment and reward. (12) "For I have found that the power which we call God is all in all. In it there are no states, it has no descriptions, there is no truth except it, nothing exists in it" (13) In one of his meditations he states

that, "For the first time I felt that God is a power in my inner being, and not an entity with which I have the relation of the created with the creator, the worshipper with the worshipped, or the judged with the judge. Thus I was overwhelmed by a sense of tranquillity which came to be like an embryo in a womb, his days matured, anxious to go out to the world." Often Mikhail Naimy resorts to similitudes in his attempts to explain to us his idea of God; "The mirror reflects the shape; similarly things reflect life, but are not in themselves life. Life exists in the tree, but the tree itself is not life. It follows that, if I substitute the word "God" for "life", then I would say that God exists in everything, but no one thing is God." (14) But how is it possible for Man to reach God? The path, Mikhail Naimy tells us, is hard: travelling it is like going to the sea to swim - there we have to take off our clothes one by one, but the clothes we have on our bodies are infinitely lighter than the clothes which burden our souls in their journey to God. The former are easy to discard, the latter are hard to dispose of: these are the garments of hatred which separate us from other men or things - and as long as that separation exists we are separated from God who exists in other men and things. Love, he says, is the way that joins us with those whom we love, or the things we love. Other garments that we have to discard in our journey towards knowing God are those of envy, greed, debauchery and arrogance. These are the chains that fetter the spirit. The path towards God lies in stripping it of them all. Thus by purifying our souls we can attain spiritual ecstasy, which is the ultimate aim of faith. If a scientist were to ask him what "proof" he has that this path will lead us to God, Mikhail Naimy would say "none!" What he would do is to ask the scientist what proof he has that the path would not lead us to God, when he has not travelled it, or what right he has to repudiate something when he has not tested it. (15) Everything in Heaven and on Earth will face its end, but the power without which there would have been no Heaven or Earth is immortal, (16) so it is worthy of Man, who seeks everlasting tranquillity, and who endeavours to rid himself of the chains of Time and Space, to build his world on the belief in that power, and not on what his limited senses reveal to him of the tangible aspects of this world. The necessity to found

our life on belief in this power can be seen in the life of men around us for, whatever inventions and discoveries we achieve, however we indulge in worldly pleasures or however arrogant we become as a result of our intellectual and artistic abilities, we always have the feeling, at one time or another, that all our achievements have not brought us any closer to the happiness and knowledge which we seek. It is then that we turn in prayer towards the power beyond pleasure and pain. (17)

In yet another attempt to elucidate his concept of God, Naimy resorts again to similitudes. Figures, he tells us, are the best example for that "Unknown"; for the one, of which all figures are formed, is infinitely divisible, infinitely multiple, yet still remains one. If you use it to refer to a mountain, then it is a mountain, if to an insect, then it is an insect, if an angel, then it is an angel, if to a devil, then it is a devil. But, in fact, it is none of these, for it is nothing but absolute mental vision, "khayāl muṭlaq", which takes various tangible forms so that it may become conceivable for those who have not yet attained the power to conceive the absolute. This idea of the "Unknown" being the "Absolute Vision" is put by Mikhail Naimy into the mouth of Dr. Mūsā al-ʿAskarī in Al-Yaum al-Akhīr. (18) Al-ʿAskarī concludes his meditation on the subject by saying "I am one of those people who have not yet achieved the power to conceive the Absolute: I feel Him, but I do not comprehend Him."

Al-Yaum al-Akhīr is revealing with respect to Mikhail Naimy's idea about God, the transmigration of souls, free will and predestination. In another passage in this work, al-ʿAskarī is made to say that: "That 'Unknown' is the One, the only One whom the people of ancient times called 'God'. Man is the most perfect image of Him on earth. But this image is still in the process of development, a matter which does not proceed haphazardly, but follows an extremely strict order. This order rewards those who go along with it, and punishes those whose intransigence leads them to oppose it. Because the majority of people are still ignorant of this order, they tend to obey it at times and oppose it at others, either consciously or unconsciously. That is why their lives waver between joy and sorrow, tranquillity and worry, growth and decay, and all kinds of contradictions varying between good and evil. As for those

who eventually comprehended the order and went along with it out of understanding, they are the blessed minority. They are those in whose inner selves the image of the One, the Only One, came to be revealed to them clear, serene, and impressive. Their lives do not waver between ebb and flow, nor do evil and good clash in them. They live in the Absolute, and by the Absolute, who is ever-lasting."

Faith, according to Mikhail Naimy's definition, consists of a goal and a path. As for the goal, it is the emancipation of Man from the bondage of the animal in Him, which would set him free to achieve the divinity which also lies dormant in him. By achieving this, he would achieve knowledge that would unveil to him the secrets of the universe, and a life that is beyond the reach of death. As to the path, it is the unflinching taming of the mind and the heart, so that they would practise virtue and avoid evil. As to what virtue and evil are, it is left to Man's conscience to discriminate between them. However, this does not imply, according to Mikhail Naimy, shunning the innocent pleasures of life and their enjoyment. Any faith that paralyses Man's mind through threats, is not a faith worthy to be adopted by Man. If Man is incapable of unifying all faiths which humanity has known, it should not be impossible for him, in his endeavour to achieve creative freedom, to discard of these faiths all that separates him from his fellow men and the universe around him, or constitutes an impediment in his way towards achieving his noble aim. He would take creative freedom for his aim in life, would find it difficult to believe in a god who kindles feelings of hatred in the hearts of his worshippers for those who take a different course in worshipping Him.

Mikhail Naimy believes that the three Faiths - Judaism, Christianity and Islam - have a common denominator: they all fundamentally agree on the origin of Man and his ultimate end, although the details of the three Faiths are different: they all state that Man is the creation of God and that his end lies with Him, and that belief, truthfulness, kindness, purity, love, self-renunciation, and resistance to desires are the means to attain salvation. To say that any of these Faiths have failed because Man has not yet been able to achieve the goals that the world Faiths have set for him is a fallacy, for these Faiths have not

set a time limit for achieving these aims. Faith, Naimy maintains, is the feeling of Man that God is in him: the faith of him whose feeling of God is pure and clear, is itself pure and clear, while the faith of him whose feeling of God is like smoke, is like smoke. But those who expect Man to be able to attain the ultimate aim of faith within a limited time are impatient, for if it takes nature thousands of years to transform a tree to a piece of wood which it buries in earth until it becomes a black piece of coal, and eventually turns into a precious diamond: we should not then expect God, who is Perfection, to make Man perfect in a short time. If it takes a piece of wood a long time to become a diamond, it is more appropriate that Man should take all time to emerge as a perfect God.

From the point of view of faith, Mikhail Naimy divides people into three categories: those who stand at the threshold of faith, whom he calls the "massive crowds", those who are scattered between the threshold and Holy of Holies, whom he calls "the crowds", while the third category are those in the Holy of Holies, whose name is "the blessed few." No human being, Mikhail Naimy tells us, is without faith: even those who disbelieve in every religion have their own faith, which is their belief. Very few, he points out, are those who have been able to reach the "spacious, infinitely generous heart of faith, whose tenderness knows no limit. For the path that leads to the heart of faith is accessible only to those who took for themselves a better guide than that of the exterior senses." He warns those who tend to think that they have reached the Holy of Holies of faith just because they belong to any particular faith, not to make such a mistake, for the mere repetition of the name of God does not mean that you have found God: "For if you repeat 'Our Father in Heaven' a thousand times every day, you will not come to know the essence of faith unless you come to know your Father in Heaven, the same way as Christ did, who came to lead you to Him. Likewise, if you ask for the blessing of the Prophet incessantly, you would still not know faith unless you came to know God the same way as the Messenger knew Him. Again, if you offer the God of Moses every sacrifice, you still would not know the God of Moses unless you came to know Him the way Moses did." In the article entitled "The Imagination", Naimy elaborates on this theme,

theme, maintaining that sense perception enables us to see things only from the point of view of their physical construction, hiding from us their underlying universal truth, which we can perceive only through our insight, or our imagination. Thus imagination, he maintains, should be the means through which we can roam the unlimited horizons of our being; and unless we try to explore the truth about ourselves through this insight, the universe will be no more to us than scattered fragments, distorted and mutilated.

True faith and true knowledge, according to Mikhail Naimy, are one and the same thing. For you are unable to know a thing unless you achieve this knowledge through experience and understanding. It is only after going through the experience and thus attaining understanding that you come to believe. Drawing a similitude, as he very often does, Mikhail Naimy tells us that believing in something before we experience it through our inner selves and understand it with our souls is a kind of belief similar to a blind eye that cannot deny the existence of the sun, or a deaf ear which accepts the existence of sounds. This kind of belief, he maintains, is blind and deaf, but still better than disbelief. Thus, in his endeavour to arrive at the objective truth about himself and about the world around him, it is incumbent upon Man that he should see beyond the illusory outward appearances of things. He claims that to rely on sense perception to achieve this aim will only mislead. Consequently, Naimy ardently believes that Man has no alternative but to resort to his inner eye (al-baṣīrah), or what he calls his imagination, which willl enable him to break through the limitations of space-time of his world. (19) Proceeding from this premise, he asserts that the Prophets would not have known God had it not been that God was in them. For it is impossible for a human being to comprehend what is beyond the realm of his own existence. Moreover, if the Prophets were not absolutely certain of the existence of God in every man, they would not have preached the existence of God to a people devoid of him.

Faith, according to Mikhail Naimy, is fundamentally a "feeling and reasoning." As such it can dispense with clergymen and temples, a condition which is capable of making of it an indissoluble link between Man and God. He seems to think that

the problem with regard to faith lies in that a large number of people deviated from its noble aims and, while clinging only to the outward appearances of it, rejected its essence. This led to faith becoming a collection of empty rituals and prayers said with the tongue, without emanating from the heart. Moreover, very many people seem to indulge in theological controversies, and to use faith for the purpose of separating Man from his fellow men, and Man from God. However, the fact that ignorance has been able to veil the light of faith, does not mean that it will be able to extinguish it: "For if the ignoramus and the pretender were able to contaminate the waters of faith, they would only affect those streams of it that lie far away from its principal spring." (20) For Mikhail Naimy, rituals do not seem to be an integral part of his concept of faith; for more than once he seems to stress that faith is not necessarily fulfilled by performing certain rituals that are "imposed upon you." In another definition of faith, he describes it as "the certainty which springs from your inner self and which assures you that life which does its work in you is the very same life which pervades other beings around you." On the basis of this definition, he goes on to say that we cling to life through our love for it, so we should love all other beings around us in which life does its work as it does it in us. "And so, when you love life in other beings the same way you love it in yourself, you would not need a temple to glorify it in except your heart, nor would you need a monk, a clergyman, a rabbi, a shaikh, or any other human being to act as intermediary between you and life. For life is closer to you than your skin, and knows your needs better than you or anybody else who claims to be closer to it than you." (21)

That there are many faiths and beliefs, Mikhail Naimy says, should never lead to a clash. For all faiths, he maintains, are no more than the "march of the created mind towards the Creative Mind, the lower vision towards the Highest Vision. They are great courses in this universe which all lead to the peak, or a multitude of rays that come together in one focusing point which is God. So if your aim in adopting your faith is to reach God, and so is mine, why then should you object to which course I should follow to attain the goal? Or why should I object to your

following a course that is different from mine?" (22)

Man's aim in life is yet another recurring theme in Naimy's writings. For a writer and thinker whose main characteristic is his religious nature and deep belief that Man is the image of God, it seems natural that he should believe that nothing less than attaining divinity is the only worthy goal for Man, especially as Naimy's belief in Man and God seem to be so closely linked that one might take his belief in one to be the same as his belief in the other. Nevertheless, he tends to remind his reader that Man's life is still shrouded with darkness despite the faint light which Science sheds on it. As long as Man is still ignorant about himself, he will never be able to understand other beings around him. Thus it is incumbent on him, in his struggle to know and to define his aim in life, to start by trying to understand himself. One of the first things that he will realize in this respect is that Man is guided by his instincts: it is through his instincts that he is driven to feed himself, multiply, resist diseases and enemies and avoid danger. Thus it is the instinct that guides the animal in Man. But Man is endowed with more worthy qualities than instincts: his intellect "al-fikr", his vision "al-khayāl", and his conscience "al-wijdān." However, these guiding "lights" in Man's life are new compared with his inborn instincts; consequently his ability to use these guiding lights in his life is very limited, a matter which drives him to resort to his instincts, which he finds easier to follow than the more recently acquired instruments of intellect, vision and conscience. But these newly acquired powers have been awakened in him and they will never lie dormant again. Thus they have united in him to work incessantly towards his emancipation from the bondage of his animal instincts and to raise him so as to be worthy of the great heritage which he was destined to inherit since time immemorial - that of becoming divine. This is because Man is the image of God.

Man, according to Naimy, is torn between the animal in him which pulls him down, and the divine which tries to raise him up - he is divided against himself, and his world is made up of two worlds - each fighting against the other. But what evidence do we have that Man is called upon to be more than an animal and more than a Man? Naimy's answer to this question is that, as

life has equipped Man with the instincts which he uses to feed himself and multiply, it has also ingrained in the human heart yearnings which have nothing to do with the animal or the instincts in him. Among these yearnings are the desire to attain complete freedom, the yearning to know everything, the yearning to conquer pain and death, and the yearning to be creative. All these yearnings, with which the heart of humanity throbs, are decisive evidence that Man's aim in life is much greater than mere survival, procreation, the acquisition of wealth, liquidating enemies and building civilisations, merely to end in the grave whence he is raised only to settle the balance of his deeds by either being thrown into eternal Fire or a Paradise whose luxurious beauty is boundless." To Mikhail Naimy, it is unacceptable that life should kindle such hopes and yearnings in the heart of humanity only out of mockery. Life, he believes, has never tempted us to pursue an aim without equipping us with the means of attaining it. "No lock is without a key", he says, thus our yearnings are destined ultimately to be realized.

A Man's world is divided between his instincts and his desire to fulfil his lofty aims, it is his duty to wage war on the animal instincts in himself. This should be the only war that Man ought to wage, using in the battle his intellect, conscience and vision. If we see that Man's wars are still the wars of one tribe against another, or one nation against another, or one race against another, or one country against another, it is because he has not yet been able to unify his forces against his only real enemy which is the animal in him. Nevertheless, Naimy believes that these wars are bound to lead Man, without his being conscious of this, to a World State, one language, one currency, and ultimately to one faith; for these wars are no more than the preparatory stages for his great struggle in which he will win victory over himself. This struggle began, he believes, when Man began to wonder whence he originated, what his ultimate end would be, and what purpose his life had. However, this wondering has not yet led Man to an answer, for he is still like "a log in its struggle against the waves; he still has not yet achieved control over his mind so as to direct it the way he wants, nor over his heart to steer it the way he likes, nor is he the master of his body to control it according to his own will. On the contrary,

we still see that Man is the plaything of his thoughts, and the slave of his prejudices and appetites." (23) But, despite his weakness and the might of life with which he is faced, Man has never given up the struggle against the unknown, against nature, and to know his aim in life. This persistence, Naimy thinks, is in itself a proof that Man is equipped with a power that is indestructible. This power is that of his soul, which is immortal.

Man is the most valuable being in the universe, for he is the creature whose being knows no limits, who never ceases, to attempt to unveil the world of the unknown through his vision, and to receive inspiration through his receptivity, from all other beings that surround him. His yearning for absolute perfection is unquenchable. Nature fulfills the purpose of its existence for his sake. As to the purpose of his own existence, it is his knowledge of himself - i.e. his knowledge of God. The knowledge of God means his knowledge of everything, and his knowledge of everything means acquiring power over everything and freedom from bondage. If that is the position of Man in the universe, Naimy asks, how could you ever assess him or define his value? Thus, he says, Man is beyond every measure and value.

To achieve his aim, Man should acquire full control of his body, mind, and heart. For he will not be able to control nature unless he is able to control himself, and if he is unable to control nature, he will be its slave. What meaning has life for Man if he does not become a god. For Man will never rest until he achieves complete control over life; then there will be no growth followed by decay, or birth followed by death, but life breeding life. Why should not Man be able to achieve that? Is he not a sacred seed emanating from the core of the all-embracing sacred Life.

The first step that Man should take to fulfil the aim of his life is to seek knowledge of himself; nothing that Man does is of any value except to the extent that it brings him nearer to knowing himself. For it is through this knowledge that Man will be able to comprehend and understand the power that drives him. Whether Man is conscious of this or not, it is in fact the criterion by which he measures his achievements: thus he discards those achievements which do not increase his knowledge of him-

self, while he preserves those which reveal to him some aspect of his nature. The history of civilisation is no more than this process of continuous sieving of Man's actions; preserving what has valuable spiritual value, and discarding that which is of no significance. Thinking of the meaning of one's life and its aim, one is driven to think of the secret of growth and decay. If growth is an astounding secret, decay is still more astonishing for, despite the magnificence of our physical structure, it is in fact no more than the froth which conceals behind it what is more important; that is the self which we call "I", and which grows not on extraneous resources, but on nurture that springs from it and within it; this is something other than bread and water, and the goad that spurs it to look for nurture is not hunger or thirst, but the yearning to know - what you are, who you are, whence you come, whither and why. This knowledge is the only means of setting you free from all that is unknown, and enables you to conquer death. Thus the problem of knowing himself is the only problem that is worthy of Man's thought. For Man is unable to solve his social, political or economic problems: the longer time passes, the more he is faced with these problems. In Mudhakkarāt al-Arqash (24), he puts these words in the mouth of al-Arqash: "Although I am one of those (ordinary) people, I find that there is no trace of their problems in my life. If I am faced with any problem, it is my yearning to know myself and nothing else. What I am sure of is that he who kindled this yearning in my soul will ultimately lead me to an answer that will quench my thirst for knowledge. It is this yearning to know that saved me from the problems of the world, as it is also the guide that leads me to my goal. Just as it saved me, it will save others, and it will lead them where it is leading me. For Man is destined for life and not for death, for knowledge and not for ignorance, for freedom and not for slavery." On another occasion the Arqash writes in his diary: "I must be two men: one who has isolated himself from the world of men and taken refuge in silence that he may lift himself to a world of a higher order in which he aspires to move, and the other is cut off from humanity by a veil which he is trying to tear away in order to rejoin the herd. Thus the second belongs to the lower world but constantly aspires to reach the Higher World, hence the war which

rages inside me." In these words we can detect the inner struggle of Mikhail Naimy himself, who never ceases to preach the idea that Man should follow the path of self-renunciation, thus setting himself free from the chains which bind him to this world in order that he may rise to a higher and more sublime goal. Without this struggle, Naimy seems to believe, Man's life would have no meaning.

The process of defining one's aim in life and seeking its meaning, is, he asserts, an enormously difficult task. In The Book of Mirdād, he describes the great difficulties he faces in climbing the steep and craggy Flint Slope by which he symbolises the forbidding impediments that face Man in his endeavour to know the truth about himself and about life. "These difficulties could be overcome only by stripping yourself of your worldly prejudices until your soul is freed from their grip - then it will be able to expand and broaden until it becomes one with the eternal, everlasting, perfect, all embracing Self." (25) Naimy never tires of telling us that this universe has an aim, and that, even if we are ignorant of it, the universe itself knows it, that humanity has an aim, the evidence of which is the existence of its yearnings and hopes. "Is it possible that we should long for something that does not exist? The longing in itself is a decisive evidence that that which we long for exists. For we would never feel hunger if there were nothing to be eaten, and if we lacked the power to eat it. Nor would we have felt thirst had there not been that which quenches our thirst. Nor would we have loved had there not been that which is to be loved. Nor would we have felt the eagerness to know had there not been that which is to be known. Our unyielding desire to know every-thing in the universe would not have been there if we did not have an innate power to attain that knowledge." (26) If the aim of humanity in its existence is knowledge of every-thing and control of everything, where does humanity stand today with respect to that goal? Naimy answers the question by saying that we do not know the length of time it took humanity to march to where it stands now, but we do know that it has suffered a great deal during this march, and thought a good deal. It has been able to discover and invent many things, and it holds these discoveries and inventions in great esteem, and calls them civi-

lisation. But, as far as its ultimate and noble goal is concerned, humanity is still at the beginning of the road, for what it has known up till now is no more than a drop compared to the ocean of things unknown to it. What it has under its control is no more than a handful compared with the towering powers that still master it: in short, humanity is still far from coming of age. As long as it is in this stage, it will remain unaware of its noble objective. As for the "aims" that Man has set for himself throughout history, they have been no more than the result of his ignorance; for when the Jews opposed Christ, and ended by crucifying Him, they were not able to put an end to His teachings. Nor was Rome, with all its might, able to crush the ideas of Christ. The same could be said about the Christian world when it attempted, through the crusades, to annihilate Islam. This "shortsightedness" of Man at this stage of history is what makes him imagine that the wiping out of his fellow men who happen to adopt faiths or views different from his own would bring him victory. Man today, in his immaturity, still follows the same path: Communists imagine that fighting Capitalists will end in victory for them, and vice versa. This is the result of Man's ignorance of the Cosmic Order and his place in it. "Would it not have been wiser, as long as we all are ignorant about this Order, as a result of which we suffer, that the one of us should have said to the other: you are ignorant, fellow-man, and so am I, and we both are the sufferers for it. Let us then wage a united war against ignorance, our ignorance, so that we might find a way to crush our enemy. When we are able to crush ignorance, then we will be able to conquer poverty, injustice, disease and even death. For only ignorance permits the existence of wealth and poverty, tyranny and oppressiin, disease and death." (27)

Meditating on the question of the immaturity of Man while on board the plane on his way to Russia in 1956, he writes, "Whenever I saw under me the peak of a mountain, a valley, a stream, a field, or a house, I used to ask it: Are you a Communist or a Capitalist?! I was only deriding myself and my fellow men who are immersed in such questions which distract them from their main and most important task in life, which is to unravel the mysteries of all that is unknown, and to break every

chain and control every power. This they will not achieve except through co-operation, which can never be founded on quarrelling and enmity, but on understanding and friendliness." (28) To Naimy, neither Communism, nor Capitalism lies at the root of the unrest, turmoil, poverty and oppression with which this world is possessed. For both systems, he seems to believe, are the outcome of the present structure of human society. If evil exists in either ideology, the cure lies not in obliterating the one or the other, but in uprooting the evil which exists in the human heart, and as long as Man is heedless of the Cosmic Law, which governs and dominates all ideologies, he will find himself more and more entangled in the web of petty struggles and wars that will lead him only to more suffering and pain.

In his belief that Man is bound to attain divinity since he is the image of God, Naimy is led to adopt the idea of the transmigration of souls, for he seems to think that the span of Man's life is too short a period to achieve that aim. Besides, he believes that death puts an end to the physical desires of Man, but not to his unfulfilled yearnings: his yearnings for justice, mercy, peace, love and a multitude of other longings which aim at a kind of life free from sadness, pain or even death. The yearning for something, according to him, presupposes the existence of that thing. As you will not have fulfilled the desires of your life in the short period before your death, so there must be a continuation of your life. "For how can you, or anybody else, be sure that the earth is the only place where you fulfil your yearnings, or that your life is the only share you have of time, when in fact compared with it the age we live is no more than a fleeting moment?" (29) This belief in the transmigration of souls came to be a substitute for his belief in the idea of Original Sin and the Day of Judgement, for it meant to him that Man can attain his salvation through his own actions. Our actions, he argues, are experiences that will lead us to knowledge. As it is impossible to attain knowledge in one "age", however long it might be, the idea of transmigration of souls makes one's life a continuous movement, interrupted by pauses which we call "death."

This concept pervades several of Naimy's works, particularly Liqā', al-Yaum al-Akhīr and his biography of Gibran. It is also

reflected in some of his poems, as he has a tendency to use poetry as a vehicle for his philosophical ideas.

wa-'indamā 'l-mautu yadnū
wa 'l-laḥdu yafghuru fāh
Aghmiḍ jufūnaka tubṣir
fi 'l-laḥdi mahda 'l-ḥayāh
(And when death comes close
And the grave opens wide its mouth
Close your eyelids and you'll see
In the grave the crade of life) (30)

What, Naimy argues, if Science does not accept the idea of the transmigration of souls? There are many spheres in Man's soul which Science avoids stepping into, as it is incapable of doing so, since it lacks the means of "dissecting" them in its laboratories. If the scientist has his laboratory, he says, then my inner self is my laboratory which accompanies me day and night, and in which I perform my experiments every minute of my life. In fact, Naimy was so much attracted by the idea of the transmigration of souls that it became one of the cornerstones on which his philosophy was built. The idea confirms his belief that life is more than a comedy which starts in the cradle and ends in the grave, only to be renewed in eternal joy or eternal torture, or to be wiped out by death as if it had never been. Man cannot be a mere toy in the hands of Fate, or even in the hands of God. He is the divine spark swaddled with bands. The spark glows incessantly until the swaddles are burnt with time, when Man will emerge as the Light that will fill Time and Space. Our "progress" is measured by the extent of zeal that our yearning for beauty, knowledge and freedom kindles in us.

Mikhail Naimy deduces from certain words of Christ that He believed in the concept of the transmigration of souls: he mentions the story in which it is said that some of the disciples asked Christ about the man who was born blind and whether it was because the Man or his parents had sinned that he was born so. Christ answers by saying that neither the man nor his parents committed a sin, and that he was born blind so that God's work might be manifested in him. Naimy argues that the disciples knew

that it was not because of any sin that the man had committed that he was born blind, and that when they asked Christ they must have known that the man had sinned before he was an embryo in his mother's womb, which means that he had lived, died and was born again, and that during his past life he must have transgressed against the Order for which he was punished by being born again blind. Christ's answer ruled out that the man's parents had sinned or that he himself had sinned but it did not rule out that blindness was a punishment through which "God's works" were manifested, and that this punishment was inflicted on the man as he must have committed sins in a former life.

Mikhail Naimy admits in al-Yaum al-Akhīr, through the words of Mūsā al-'Askarī, that he has no proof for his belief in the idea of the transmigration of souls: "All I can say is that I felt that I was living in a fearful vacuum. Suddenly this idea arose in my mind to fill the vacuum." The idea appeals to him as it seems to be just that Man should have, in his own hands, the power to reward or punish himself, and not to blame God, life, or nature for any pain that he suffers. The idea also seems to him to put an end to Man's fear of death, as it makes of Man an honest servant of life and not an opponent to it. He also feels that it is fair that Man should be given the chance to live more than once to enable him to know the Order, as one life is not a long enough time to know it. Which is more logical, Naimy asks, that God should say to Man that he had created him, would put an end to his life, then bring him back to life on the Day of Judgement to reward or punish him for his deeds, or that He should address him by saying: "You are my image, but you do not know yourself nor do you know me. As for me, I know myself and I know you. That is why I created for you the Heavens and the Earth, and all that there is in them so that these may be your means of helping yourself to achieve knowledge of yourself and of me. I have laid before you all Time to enable you to achieve that knowledge. To make your task easier, I made your life go through stages so that work is followed by rest, hunger followed by satisfaction, childhood followed by youth, youth followed by middle age, middle age followed by old age, and old age followed by death. I put an end to your life, then bring you back to life. This is repeated until you achieve knowledge of yourself

and me. Then you will come to be beyond the limits of Time and Space, beyond the reach of growth and decay, and above the power of good and evil" Naimy criticizes Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī's famous line in which he says:

> Taʿabun kulluhā 'l-ḥayātu fa-lā aʿjatu illā min
> rāghibin fī izdiyād
> (Life is no more than toil –
> How bewildered I am by him who wishes to
> live longer)!

by saying that Abu al-'Ala' and his fellow-pessimists thought of life as having a beginning and an end, an assumption which lies at the root of their pessimism. Thus they were led to wonder what value this life had, when it starts with hunger and ends with hunger. The answer to such a way of thinking, according to Naimy, is that vision should be detached from the chains of beginnings and ends. By doing so it can see life and death as only two stages out of many that extend along Time itself, and that thought should be freed from the bonds of the flesh and blood, so as to comprehend life's intention of making hunger a goad that spurs humanity to find an answer for the mysteries of life and to cling to it, rather than despair of it. (31)

Who, Naimy ask, can decisively say that the grave is the line drawn between being and non-being, and that death is the end of life? Or who can claim that the Power which brought us into being had imposed hunger and thirst on us, so as to make us their submissive slaves? Who of us has not once said, openly or secretly, "I wish we could conquer death and that we should be able to lead a life that is all peace, justice, beauty and tranquillity. I wish we knew all that we do not know." The mere fact that we do express such hopes to achieve immortality, peace, justice, tranquillity and complete knowledge, is evidence of our great need for them. Our duty is to strive with all our might to achieve them. That we cannot do this in one life is an indication that the years we live are not "all" life, but only one stage of it, and that our struggle will end in knowledge – the knowledge of God, which will be the nourishment that will satisfy every hunger and thirst. That is the soil where the

seeds of sadness or pain never take root. (32)

Mikhail Naimy's philosophy revolves, as we have seen, around the idea of the "Cosmic Order", in which he sees the truth of divinity to lie in love, in the broadest sense of the word, beauty, and harmony with life and Man's surroundings. There is nothing in life, according to this doctrine, but obeys this Order. As this Order seems to be synonymous with another expression which Naimy uses - "the Power which controls the universe" - one is prompted to examine the extent to which this conception of the Order, or Power differs from the conception of God in the principal faiths that the world has known. The attributes of God as being the Merciful, the Forgiving, the Compassionate, as well as being the Mighty, the Conqueror, the One who inflicts punishment and bestows rewards on the Day of Judgement, are fundamental in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Mikhail Naimy, born a Christian and taught these fundamental attributes of God, seems later, as a result of his readings and meditations, to reject certain attributes of God, while affirming others. A man who lacked a deep religious sense and an immense desire to believe, might have been led, by the confusion of acceptance on the one hand and rejection on the other, either to agnosticism or to atheism. But Mikhail Naimy is a man who was born with a deep and innate religious nature: since his early youth the questions relating to the universe, the Creator, Man, Man's origin and fate, the meaning of life, have all preoccupied his thoughts. His brilliant inquisitive mind, sharpened through reading works in several cultures, led him to a kind of scepticisim, and ultimately to reject certain teachings of the Church, while clinging stubbornly at the same time to certain other teachings to which his deep religious nature responded. Here, it seems lies the root of the conflict in his inner self. The dilemma which he faced since his early youth was how to strike a satisfactory and harmonious balance between his heart, which "believed" and his mind, which "rejected." It also seems that the orthodox images which the word "God" evoked, became unacceptable to him: "For what use is it to invent names for the one, or the thing, that controls people, and all that exists in this infinite universe? Soon the name would become a lock that fastens our comprehension, a cage that imprisons our yearnings, a

slippery path for our vision, a chain for our will, and a spear with which we stab each other openly and in secret."(33) But a believer must, by necessity, give a name, a term, to denote the thing which he believes in. Thus, Naimy coins the phrase "Cosmic Order", which in fact comes to be the basis of his new "faith." This "faith" is founded in the first place on Naimy's meditations on Man and Nature around us: the miracle of our bodies and how they function, the eternal aspects of nature: the sun, its rising and setting, the seed sown to become a grain, and so on. (34) But instead of urging us to think of the "marvel-Maker", God, the Creator, Mikhail Naimy seems to urge us to think of the "marvel" itself - what is behind the marvel and the marvel itself seem to be one to him. Consequently, God (the Creator), in Naimy's philosophy, is brought to be part of the created, whether it is the universe or Man. This outlook seems to verge on pantheism, as Man, God and life seem to form part of each other. (35) The Man-Order relationship is a subject that preoccupies him in expounding a philosophy which is based on his faith in the Cosmic Order. Man, he maintains, is happy or unhappy to the extent his intellect adjusts itself to be in harmony with the Order and life around him. But, as he also maintains that nothing in the universe happens accidentally or by chance, and that everything happens or takes shape in obedience to the Order, one is bound to ask: are not our intellect, vision, and conscience all dependent on the Order and is not the extent to which they are likely to help us in understanding it consequently predetermined by it? If we accept Naimy's assumption that everything happens in obedience to the Order, then we may assume that it is part of the order itself that we should be able to go against it. It must be part of its will that we should have the power to deviate from it. He gives us an answer to this argument by maintaining that the aim of the deviation from the Order is to lead us to it, "Just as opposites are implicit in each other", but never goes into much detail on how this happens.

The doctrine that everything in the universe succumbs to the will of the Order, raises the question whether Mikhail Naimy believes in predestination or Free Will. In Zād al-Ma'ād, he writes, "Fate is the will of the universe which does its work in everything and for everything. He who opposes it works for his

own torture, and he who obeys it acts for his own good." Again, in al-Bayādir, he says, "It is not for Man, who is ignorant of his beginnings, to define his ends. For how could the one who does not know the reason for his existence indicate this or that aim for this existence?" and "He who can say "I know", is entitled to say "I want." As for Man, who is still confined to the world of limitations, he is far from this knowledge. His own will is bound to be his misfortune whenever it runs contrary to the Omniwill. He has no alternative, therefore, if he wants to rid himself of misfortune, but to say "I will so and so, if God will so and so."(36) On the other hand, he maintains that the order has endowed Man with the forces of mind, conscience, and insight to enable him to unveil its mysteries, but that very few individuals are able to use these forces, and that the majority of human beings abuse them to their own destruction. One might deduce from this that Naimy believes that Man's own will, vis-a-vis the Omniwill, is of no weight. What he seems to believe is that this will of Man should be directed by him so as to be harmonious with the will of the Order. (37)

If the God in which Mikhail Naimy believes is "above life and death" and "more sublime than punishment and reward", one wonders how it is possible to reconcile this transcendental image of God with another image which he presents when he says, "As a result of my meditations I felt for the first time that God is a power inside my inner being, and not an entity with which I have the relation of the created with the creator" or when he repeats that Man himself "is a god in swaddling-bands." If the universe, with all there is in it of the tangible and abstract is the "body" of God, and "you and I form part of Him" (38) it is again difficult to see how this image of God is reconciled with the God who is above punishment and reward. Another aspect of Naimy's image of God which is difficult to understand is his saying that what led him to God was God Himself, not what he read about Him in sacred or secular books. Are we to deduce from this that his knowledge of God came to him through a kind of revelation, or is it merely an intuition and an inner feeling? and how can we dispose of all that Naimy read about God in the various philosophies and faiths which discussed the subject of God? The same could be said of Naimy's belief in Man, when he states that

what led him to believe in Man was Man himself, not what he came to know of his history, science, and arts. Are not these in themselves part of Man? It is of no use, Naimy states, that we should claim belief in God before God is revealed to us in Man, as it is of no use to try to understand Man before he is revealed to us in God. Neither aim can be achieved before our vision is freed from every chain, which would enable us to see the Creator in the created, and the created in the Creator. Here we are bound to ask, who achieved this other than the Prophets or the Mystics? Mikhail Naimy in fact assumes that his reader asks this very question, when he says in Zād al-Maʿād (p.130-131): "You ask me, 'How can we, when we are not prophets, know God? Must we all become prophets?' Have you not heard of the inspiration of prophets or their ecstasy? It is a spiritual condition in which the confused senses are silenced, their desires are dimmed, and their flames extinguished. Man then feels as if he is no longer of flesh and blood. It is then that he sees - with his eyes open or closed - what no eye sees. He hears then - with his ears open or closed - what no ear hears. It is then that he is unbound from the chains of Time, seeing himself in all Time. The barriers of place around him fall down, and he sees himself in every place. He, in fact, feels as if Time and Space do not exist, nor death nor life - the only thing he feels is a state of Being, boundless and immeasurable, beyond the description of pen or tongue. Every sound is contained in this state, but it has itself no sound. Every colour it contains, but no colour it has. Every movement emanates from it, when it is everlastingly serene. Every being is in it, while it is above every being. Everything is in it when it is nothing." How is it, the student of Naimy is compelled to ask, that he describes to us a state which he himself has not been through, unless by giving this description he is referring to the experience which he went through at an earlier stage of his life after his return one summer from Russia. However, it is a difficult task, if not impossible, for a believer to express in words the essence of his belief. None better describes this difficulty than Naimy hinself when he says, in Karm ʿalā darb, "I broke my pen twice: once when I tried to analyse my belief in God, and the other when I tried to analyse my belief in myself. Today I have collected the splinters of my

pen and joined them together. It is now stronger than it ever was - for it set aside analysis, and busied itself with recording." (40)

The main theme in Memoirs of a Vagrant Soul is the unity between God and Man. Al-Arqash in this book (is one to take him for Naimy himself?) seems to devote his whole life to the attainment of this unity. In the course of his meditations, he ponders over the question of people's preoccupation with the trivialities of life and their misfortunes. But where do these trivialities and misfortunes come from? If everything is decreed by the Order (God?) then they must be the outcome of the Order's will. If the Order is synonymous with God - which must be the case if we take Mikhail Naimy's views to be very close to pantheism - then God does punish, does inflict misfortunes, and does make people turn their minds to trivialities. How can we reconcile this with Mikhail Naimy's belief that God is above inflicting punishment and giving reward? The problem here is not only Naimy's: it is the problem of pantheism since Man thought it out. (41)

Mikhail Naimy's faith excludes, besides punishment, reward and the idea of resorting to threats. In Fī Mahabb al-Fīh, he says that any faith that paralyses Man's mind through threats is not a faith that is worthy of adoption by Man. But, if Man is still far from achieving perfection, as he himself seems to believe, does it not stand to reason that faiths, being the paths to God, should guide Man, by promises and threats, to the right path? How far can a father (to use an analogy as Naimy often does) bring up a son to follow righteousness, and dispense at the same time with all kinds of threats? Is Man, at the present stage of his development in his knowledge of God, any more than a child? Is not fear united, in God, with its complement: hope?

The image of God that Mikhail Naimy presents to us is devoid of any trace of might, threats or punishment. At the same time, God is presented to us as part both of Nature and of Man. How is it then that He should be devoid of these attributes, when they form part of Man and Nature? God is all love, gentleness and kindness, Naimy seems to believe. But is Man or Nature, of which He forms a part, according to Naimy, all love gentleness and kindness? How can we then interpret violence of both Nature and

Man? Are we not to take this belief on Naimy's part as the manifestation of his idealism inspired mainly by the example of the life of Christ and Naimy's own genuine goodness and kindly nature which refuses to see anything contradictory to his conception of goodness in God, Man or the universe? The course which Naimy's own life took seems unconsciously to have confirmed him in this belief in this one-sided picture of God, Man and the universe: it must be the "Unseen Hand" (42) of this goodness that must have led the far-away Russians to build a school in a little village called Biskinta that lies up on the Lebanese mountains. The man who looked after him in Haifa, when he arrived there as a young boy on his way to Nazareth, must have also been led by the "Unseen Hand" of this goodness. In Nazareth, his idealistic nature drove him so close to the person of Christ that he almost came to be a living example whose steps were to be followed, and teachings lived up to. In Russia, his admiration for Tolstoy, who fundamentally took the Bible and the life of Christ as his guiding light in life, enhanced the idealistic trait in his character. This idealism led Naimy to set an extremely high standard for ordinary people with respect to faith and belief: A man will never come to know God, even if he repeats "Our Father in Heaven" a thousand times a day, or asks for the blessings of the Prophet incessantly, unless he comes to know God just as Christ or the Prophet came to know him. Is not Naimy here asking too much of the ordinary human being? Is it possible for us, when we are so far from perfection, to attain this degree in our conception of God, who alone is the Perfect? (43) Moreover, Naimy believes that faith is fundamentally a matter of "feeling and reasoning" which is difficult to accept, as faith is more connected with our trust in the real existence of something. This trust is not based fundamentally on feeling and reasoning, although reason may be able to confirm and strengthen it. Rituals, he also seems to think, are not an essential part of faith. But, if we interpret the word "rituals" very broadly, we may be able to conceive of it as embracing "meditations", which do seem to be an integral part of Naimy's faith. Why should his meditations (44), (his rituals) seem to be necessary in his faith, and unnecessary in the faiths of others? We may also ask: is not discipline an essential part of spiritual progress? and

what are rituals, in their essence, other than discipline? If people perform them with their tongues not with their hearts, this should be taken to be the fault of men rather than the fault of the rituals.

Mikhail Naimy seems often to glorify "Life" to the extent that the word sounds as if he equates it with God. He urges us to "love Life in other beings just as we love it in ourselves." Here we are reminded of Albert Schweitzer's doctrine of "Reverence For Life", which has a religious character and which is essentially related to Christianity. (45) Life is so glorified, that it almost comes to be divine, and our love for it is conceived as a kind of prayer in which we recognize its divinity.

Man is divided, Mikhail Naimy tells us, between the animal in him and his yearning to attain his lofty and noble aims. Thus, to be able to achieve these aims, he should wage war against his animal instincts. But, if these animal instincts in Man were pre-ordained by the Cosmic Order (as nothing happens or takes shape, according to Naimy, except in obedience to It), then it follows that Naimy here is urging Man to oppose the will of the Cosmic Order by trying to suppress every sign of the animal instinct in him, which entirely contradicts the general trend of his philosophy which urges us to adapt our thinking and behaviour so that they come to be harmonious with the will of the Order. One is inclined here to think that Naimy's continuous insistence that Man's "animal" instinct should be eradicated to attain his sublime aims is the remnant of an unconscious inclination to look upon sex and the animal instinct in Man as being sinful and unworthy of him. (46) If not, why is it, one wonders, that Naimy does not urge Man to suppress his instinct to satisfy his hunger, or his instinct to protect himself against dangers?

It may be true that ignorance, as Naimy says, leads Man to wage war against his fellow man, but unfortunately men are not united, either in admitting their ignorance, or in defining what knowledge is. If the selected few, like Mikhail Naimy, are ready to admit their "ignorance" and set it up as their enemy which should be crushed, the majority of men, though immersed in their ignorance of what life means or what its aims are, are convinced beyond any doubt that they "know" what their aim in life is, and

that even sacrificing their own lives to achieve that aim is a duty which is praiseworthy and noble. Naimy's assumption, therefore, that "we all are ignorant about this Order" is perhaps difficult to take for granted: the "all" he seems to think of, is no more than the idealistic elite and humble few: "All" others do not seem to belong to this category of human beings. Indeed, very few seem to venerate knowledge so as to make it the goals of Man's life. That every single human being will one day set this lofty goal as his aim in life, presupposes that men, all men, will be endowed with an equally extraordinary intelligence, and the history of Man, past and present, leads one to be sceptical about the possibility that this assumption will prove justified in the future, however distant that future may be. Moreover, one wonders how we can be sure that "ignorance only" permits the existence of wealth and poverty, tyranny and oppression, disease and death? Could it not be that God has a hand in these things?

As we have seen, Mikhail Naimy believes profoundly in a Cosmic Law or Order, and that every thing and every being is governed by this Order. This comprehensive outlook on life is closely linked with a deep religious feeling, the essence of which is that love, goodness, the brotherhood of Man, and beauty are the true foundations of life. Nothing in this universe perishes, everything exists from the beginnings of Time to Eternity. This philosophy, in which Naimy believes profoundly, is the source of serenity, tranquillity and clarity, which is reflected in a most impressive manner in his writings, and which leads the reader to imagine that these same attributes are the most striking features of Naimy the Man. He himself writes that he takes life as "a theme which varies, a melody rising and falling" but is always, in all its different variations, coloured by positivity and never drawn into negativity. This positive and optimistic outlook makes Mikhail Naimy "utterly free from that psychological disease of which the writers of our time suffer: the feeling of being lost and engrossed in complexes, together with the tendency to run away from the burdens of life's responsibilities." (47) Nothing is more true of the "spirit" of Naimy's writings: his words infiltrate his reader's heart, filling it with tranquillity and peace. However, this tendency to look upon life with contentment is faced with the problem of

trying to understand the phenomenon of death, which it refuses to accept because it puts a definite end to the doctrine of the immortality of life, its goodness, beauty and the belief that it is more than a comedy which starts with the cradle and ends with the grave. The grimness of such a "life" is made to look even worse to Mikhail Naimy by the orthodox teachings of the three faiths on Judgement, punishment and reward. It is from here, one feels, that Naimy's optimistic outlook, which rebells against this "conclusion" of life, turns towards the idea of the trans-migration of souls. If death, which is a fact that cannot be denied, is to be given an interpretation harmonious with the outlook of optimism, then it is logical that Naimy should accept the doctrine of transmigration, which makes of death a "pause" in the flow of life, and not an end to it. He himself admits in al-Yaum al-Akhīr that the idea "dispels the fear of death in him." Moreover, it "relieves" God of the task of inflicting punishment, for the doctrine teaches that our happiness or misery are the outcome of our own actions.

Mikhail Naimy's philosophy is based on a passionate belief in the goodness of life, and that Man will one day be able to eradicate from himself what Naimy deems to be unworthy of him. This belief is expounded with warmth that springs from the writer's heart. His brilliant mind rationalises the deep faith, while his pen, served by a vivid imagination, so sways the reader with the beauty of his style, that the words tend to influence the reader's feelings, even when his mind is liable to question the logic of the idea presented. This, in a lanugage noted for its captivating beauty, makes the task of the analyst a difficult one.

NOTES

1. Abʿad min Mūskū wa-min Wāshinṭun, 51, 52
2. This tendency towards fatalism in Mikhail Naimy is unique among modern Arab writers and thinkers, especially those who lived in the West during the same period as he did. A good example of Arab of thinkers in modern times is Salama Musas, who, after living in the West, became an ardent socialist, and attributed the backwardness of the Arab

World mainly to its peoples' fatalistic attitude towards life. See Musa, 1961, 181

3. Mikhail Naimy is probably referring here to Prophets or to the Mystics

4. Sab'ūn, III 15, 16-17. It is possible that this idea is based on the idea that Man is the image of God. Man, after the Fall, detached himself from God (The Scriptures (sifr al-takwīn)), but as there remained in him the seed of divinity, Naimy seems to maintain that he is bound to grow to become, ultimately, one with God. Here again it appears Mikhail Naimy's philosophy is based on fundamental Christian beliefs, although he invariably endeavours to extend it beyond the beliefs of one particular faith

5. The Atman in Hinduism is a Universal as well as a personal self. In its essence it is one with Everlasting Spirit. It may be that Naimy's idea of "ittiṣāl al-nafs bi-'l-kaun" is derived from his readings of the Upanishads and Hinduism in general

6. From a letter by M. Naimy addressed to H. Dabbagh dated 21 Sept. 1967

7. "'Iẓat al-Ghurāb" al-Marāḥil, 126. The Arabs have a common superstition about the raven. The origin of this is perhaps connected with its black colour, which is the colour of mourning. Its croaking is taken to predict separation They also believe that the raven was treacherous to Noah who sent it from the Ark to bring news of the Flood but never returned. The writer took the raven as a symbol of Man's enemy, when Man, according to the writer, should not look upon any other creature as an enemy, since he forms a "unity" (waḥdah) with the universe, which includes the raven as well as everything else

8. From a letter by M. Naimy addressed to H. Dabbagh, dated 21 Sept. 1967

9. Karm 'alā Darb, 68

10. The Book of Mirdād, English version, 64

11. Al-Bayādir, 68-69

12. "Punishment and reward are words that have a place in the human dictionary. The Cosmic Law cannot be said to be kind or unkind. It is a Law. Man punishes or rewards himself

as he deviates from the Law or complies with it"; from a letter by M. Naimy addressed to H. Dabbagh dated 21 Sept. 1967

13. Zād al-Maʿād, 21
14. Sabʿūn, III, 48, 74
15. Zād al-Maʿād, 131-134
16. The Qurʾān states: "All that dwells upon earth is perishing, yet still abides the Face of thy Lord, majestic, splendid" The Holy Qurʾān, LV. (The All-Merciful), 26. One wonders whether Naimy is influenced here by his knowledge of the Qurʾān
17. Al-Bayādir, 25, 49-50
18. Like Mirdad in The Book of Mirdād, Mūsā al-ʿAskarī in al-Yaum al-Akhīr speaks for Mikhail Naimy himself
19. See article entitled "The Imagination", Zād al-Maʿād, 7-19
20. Durūb, 33-34
21. Abʿad min Mūskū wa-min Wāshinṭun, 32-34
22. Al-Bayādir, 21
23. Ṣaut al-ʿĀlam, 63
24. Memoirs of a Vagrant Soul or Mudhakkarāt al-Arqash. The "Arqash", like "Mirdād" in The Book of Mirdād and "al-ʿAskarī" in al-Yaum al-Akhīr, expresses the ideas of Mikhail Naimy himself
25. Sabʿūn, III, 217
26. Ṣaut al-ʿĀlam, 40-41
27. Abʿad min Mūskū wa-min Wāshinṭun, 199. The ignorance of which Naimy is talking about here is not "The inability to read or write, or to know about this or that science", but Man's ignorance of the secret of life, and the powers that control it
28. ibid, 150
29. Sabʿūn, III, 234-235
30. Hams al-Jufūn, 9
31. Although Abū al-ʿAlāʾ's line does indicate his pessimistic outlook on life, it should not be taken to indicate his views on what happens after death. In the same poem, Abū al-ʿAlāʾ says: Khuliqa 'l-nāsu li'l-baqāʾi, fa-ḍallat ummatun yaḥsabūnahum li'l-nafādi (Men were created for eternity, those who think they are to perish are wrong).

It would be similarly far-fetched to take this line to mean that he believed in the transmigration of souls

32. Ṣaut al-ʿĀlam, 32-33

33. Abʿad min Mūskū wa-min Wāshinṭun, 51-52. Needless to say, in this respect, the Qurʾān abounds with verses which urge Man to look around him and think of the Creator who created everything and made it follow a system of unparalleled organisation. See for instance The Holy Qurʾān, Ch.II, V. 159

35. It seems to matter little to Naimy what name you give to his philosophical concept of God, as is clear from the following sentence in a letter by him addressed to the writer: "When you view this boundless universe and the infinite variety of marvellously shaped and ordered things and beings, you can not escape the thought that the Power that brought it into existence and continues to sustain it everlastingly is one and the same. It matters little what you call it. What's in a name? As in the Gospel of St.John, "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." If you call that pantheism let it be pantheism."

36. Al-Bayādir, 31. It is noteworthy to mention here the verse in the Qurʾān which states: "And do not say, regarding anything, 'I am going to do that tomorrow,' but only 'If God will'." The Holy Qurʾān, XVIII, (The Cave), 24

37. It is not within the scope of this study of Mikhail Naimy's thought to go into the complex details of Free Will and Predestination. However, Professor Montgomery Watt maintains that to believe in one does not necessarily mean to repudiate the other. See Watt, 1948, 2

38. Zād al-Maʿād, 21; Sabʿūn, II, 74; The Book of Mirdād, English version, 46; Al-Bayādir, 55, respectively

39. See the chapter on His Life, p.29

40. Karm ʿalā darb is a collection of parables and paradigms. True to an Arab's love of proverbs and sayings, coupled with his exquisite mastery of the Arabic tongue, Mikhail Naimy makes these proverbial sayings sound most impressive in the original. No translation is able to do them justice.

41. Spinoza, the philospher, was one of the leading exponents

of pantheism, whose whole philosophy was dominated by the idea of God. Mikhail Naimy does not mention Spinoza at all in his writings, although he mentioned many of the writers and thinkers whom he admires. However, Naimy's conception of God bears similarity to that expounded by Spinoza, except that Naimy does not reject Free Will altogether, while Spinoza does. See Russell, 1950, 594

42. Naimy often refers to accidents in his life as being predestined by "al-yad al-khafiyah" or the "Unseen Hand."

43. In Islam, Perfection is the attribute of God alone "al-kamāl li-'llāh waḥdah." "Perfection belongs to God alone." Through his writings, Mikhail Naimy seems to share this belief. If he accepts this premise, one expects that he should accept the orinary man's limitations and his inability to rise to the same degree in his conception of God which the Prophets and Mystics achieved. It may be of interest here to mention the view of Ibn 'Arabi, who states in his al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyah, Vol.II, 309: "know that it is a part of the perfection of the universe that imperfection exists in it. For if this was not the case, then the perfection of the universe would have been incomplete for lack of imperfection in it."

44. In his article "Why I isolated myself from people" in Saut al-'Alam, 150, Naimy seems to give the impression that his meditations are a necessity for him practised almost like a worshipper performing his rituals.

45. Naimy's idea about loving life in ourselves just as we love it in other beings somewhat resembles Schweitzer's statement in which he maintains that "If our will to live begins to think about itself and the world, we come to experience the life of the world, so far as it comes within our reach, in our own life, and to devote our will-to-live to the infinite will-to-live through the deeds we do." See Burnett, W. ed. This is my Philosophy, London, Allen & Unwin, 1958, 64

46. On this point, M. Naimy states the following in a letter addressed to H. Dabbagh, dated 21 Sept. 1967: "To be sure Instinct is part of the Cosmic Law. But it is the lowest grade of self-consciousness. The highest grade is Cosmic

Consciousness. Man, an evolving being, is endowed with all the potentialities of becoming cosmically conscious. To become cosmically conscious he must rid himself of all the bars and restrictions that stand between him and that consciousness. Such bars are his animal instincts and his sense of a self separate and independent of the Cosmic or Universal Self. Therefore Man must subdue his animal instincts and his sense of a separate self which is only a shadow, - an illusion."

47. Muruwwa, 1965, 48. (The chapter on Mikhail Naimy). The author who is a well-known critic, is presumably referring to writers in the Arab World.

Chapter 4: EAST AND WEST

> "To understand the East-West conflict is vitally important. More than that, it is becoming daily more urgent. We must substitute knowledge for emotion, and it is in the light of this knowledge that our decisions should be made."
> (C. Northcote Parkinson in East and West

The mystical element in Mikhail Naimy's thinking, and the years which he spent both in Russia and the United States played an important role in forming his attitude towards the civilisations of the East and the West. Here we have a man who, from the early years of his youth, pondered on the meaning of life, its aims, Man and his beginnings and ends. Since his early years in Russia, he came to live in two worlds - a world which he created of himself for himself, and a world which other men created for themselves. The two worlds lived side by side in him, but they never became united. To him, the outside world "choked with the dust and smoke of its sins. Its dust hurts me, and its smoke blinds my sight. In it I am a stranger."(1) The personal experience which he went through in the summer of 1909 on his return to Biskinta (2), seems to have confirmed the element of Nature-Mysticism in him which drove him to search for "something that is important, distant and vague." Later, through his meditations and reading, Mikhail Naimy came to believe in the doctrine of the Cosmic Order which he himself elaborated. This is a doctrine not far from Nature-Mysticism, which is characterized by a feeling of the immanence of God or soul in Nature. Zaehner, in his Mysticism, Sacred and Profane, describes this aspect of Mysticism as the "experience of the All in the One and the One in the All." (3) Naimy, who sees God, Nature and Man (who seems to be contained in One for him) as the Epitome of all that is good in life, does not differ much in his concept of the Almighty from William Blake, who says:

> "For Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love
> Is God, our father dear,
> And Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love

Is Man, his child and care."(4)

Nor is the love for Nature which pervades Naimy's writings, different from the love of Nature which Wordsworth expresses in his words:

"And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things." (5)

Naimy's Nature-Mysticism is similar also to that expressed by Shelley when he says:

"That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,
That Beauty in which all things work and move,
That Benediction which the eclipsing curse
Of birth can quench not, that Sustaining Love
Which through the web of being blindly wove
By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
The fire for which all thirst, now beams on me,
Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality."(6)

Mikhail Naimy, himself one of the leading contemporary poets of the Arab world, expresses the same ideas of love for Nature, through which he sees the Almighty in everything that exists, in a poem which he calls "Ibtihalat":

Kahhili 'llāhumma ʿainaiya
bi-shuʿāʿin min ḍiyāka
kai turāka
Fī jamī'i 'l-khalqi : fī dūdi 'L-qubūr

fī nusūri 'l-jawwi, fī manji 'l-bihār
fī ṣahārīji 'l-barārī, fī 'l-zuhūr
fī 'l-kalā, fī 'l-tibri, fī ramli 'l-qifār
("Oh God! have my eyes endowed
with rays of Your Light,
So that they see You
in all creatures:
in the worms of the graves,
in the eagles of the skies,
in the waves of the seas,
in the lakes of the land,
in flowers, in grass,
in gold,
And in the sands of the wild land.")

This "supplication", in which the poet asks God to enable him to see Him in all aspects of Nature, reaches its climax when he asks Him to make his heart "An Oasis that quenches the thirst of the far and the near":

wa-aj'al allāhumma qalbī
wāḥatan tasqī 'l-qarīb
wa'l-gharīb (7)

This mystical element in Mikhail Naimy's thinking faced a crisis when he went to live in the United States: as a young Christian idealist influenced by the ideas of Rousseau and Tolstoy which glorify the simplicity of life in Nature as opposed to the artificiality of urban life, it was not unnatural that he should feel "down at heart" on his first visit to New York, which looked to him no more than "the Tower of Babel carried from the banks of the Tigris and the Euphrates to the banks of the Hudson." A civilisation which permits the machine to interfere in Man's life to the extent of using it to control even his own conscience, is to Naimy a civilisation that is doomed to bankruptcy, "For I know that there are those who think seriously of inventing a machine which would be able to unveil the inner thoughts of Man's heart and mind, so that a witness in a court would be unable to say what he does not know, or to contradict

what he actually knows. What hope would you thus have for a civilisation that surrendered its mind and conscience, its justice and honour to the Dollar, which in its turn surrendered her to the machine - yet what hope is there for such a civilisation except that it should end in ruins?"(8) This abhorrence of the machine dominating modern Man's life reminds one of Spengler's view on the subject, when he says:

"Never save here has a microcosm felt itself superior to its macrocosm, but here the little life-units have by the sheer force of their intellect made the unliving dependent upon themselves. It is a triumph, so far as we can see, unparalleled. Only this our Culture has achieved it, and perhaps only for a few centuries.

But for that very reason Faustian man has become the slave of his creation. His number, and the arrangement of life as he lives it, have been driven by the machine on to a path where there is no standing still and no turning back. The peasant, the hand-worker, even the merchant, appear suddenly as inessential in comparison with the three great figures that the machine has bred and trained up in the cause of its development: the entrepreneur, the engineer and the factory-worker. Out of a quite small branch of manual work - namely, the preparation economy - there has grown up (in this one Culture alone) a mighty tree that casts its shadow over all the other vocations - namely, the economy of the machine-industry. It forces the entrepreneur not less than the workman to obedience. Both become slaves, and not masters, of the machine, that now for the first time develops its devilish and occult power."(9)

To Mikhail Naimy, Western civilisation's main fault lies in its tendency to give priority to the intellect, which led to its dazzling success in the field of Science and inventions. On the other hand, it neglected altogether what he terms the "heart", where all the sinister and lofty desires struggle violently against each other". This lack of balance in Western civilisation between the "mind" and the "heart" resulted, in his view, in the overwhelming tide of selfishness, rancour, hatred,

greed, and deceitfulness. These desires, he explains, if allowed to run free, are bound to destroy the product of the mind, turning it into the means of destruction, a source of misery and a set-back rather than a starting point. These are the factors which are doing their work in dealing the death-blow to Western Civilisation, as they also destroyed the civilisations that preceded it. In an article entitled "A World That Has Gone Insane"(10), Naimy seems to come to the conclusion that one of the main faults of present Western civilisation lies in the fact that there exists in it a wide gap between the power it puts at the disposal of modern Man against nature, and its failure to provide him with a corresponding spiritual power which would enable him to have a goal or a purpose for his life. Thus the power of Man in his modern world is leading him towards an un-ending craving for more material expansion which becomes the aim of his life and its ultimate goal.

Wondering what point Science has reached in its search for the secret of the matter, Naimy says that Science realized a long time ago that matter is made up of atoms in which its secret lies. Thus Science strove to find the means to divide the atom which it ultimately achieved. But what has Science achieved by this? It learned about the electrons, protons and neutrons which are united by an energy that is capable of destroying and creating things. But as to what the proton, electron or neutron are, or why they are united in a certain manner, or why it is that one atom is united with others to form all these astonishing elements in the universe, among which is Man, giving him eyes to see, eyelids to protect the eyes, wonderful senses of hearing, touch, and taste, breath - all these and other questions are not answered by Science, nor is it capable of giving an answer to them. Moreover, Science is unable to tell us about the secret of life and death, or to inform us as to the nature of that energy which brings atoms together to form tangible matter. How is it that we can see the effects of this energy, when we are unable to see the energy itself? Is this energy working towards a goal, or is it doing its work aimlessly? Is it possible that this energy is giving an aim to all that it makes, when it itself is devoid of any aim? Is it not possible that this energy which pervades everything that exists in the universe, organizing everything in

it, moving everything in it, has reason, sight and purpose? And who are we, with our limited minds, to pass judgement on its mind, or to measure, with our short sight, its sight or, with our limited aims, to define its aim? Is it not possible that this energy, with its sense, sight, and aim, is an aspect of that Eternal and Immortal Soul which controls everything, existing in everything, capable of everything, the Creator of everything? Is it not possible that it is my soul and yours, and the soul of every seen and unseen object in heaven and earth and that power is derived from it, and not from wealth, weapons or authority that glory emanates from it and not from nations and homelands that Light comes from it and not from Science and its laboratories that Life and liberty are derived from it, and not from constitutions and agreements? Mikhail Naimy concludes this meditation by proclaiming that the Spirit is the One which is worthy of being worshipped and glorified.(11)

Science, Naimy says, has limited itself by relying exclusively on empirical results. Scientific "facts", he maintains, are proportionately factual, since tangible matters in the universe with which Science concerns itself are constantly in a state of flux. The same applies to Man, who is constantly changing and developing. If neither the object of the experiment nor Man who is performing it is stable, how can we accept the results of the experiment to be final and stable? A person's feelings, he goes on to say, his imagination, dreams, and illusions are "facts" to him. But the Eternal Fact, the Absolute Fact which encompasses Time and is not encompassed by time, which encompasses Space and is not contained by space, is not within the reach of Science, and is too complex for it to comprehend or grasp. He maintains that, although our modern civilisation does not provide us with the final answers as to the aim of our life, it is an ineluctable step in the process towards achieving this goal. "All civilisations may be necessary steps in the long march of Man towards final emancipation, which means the shedding of Man's shadow, or illusory ego, and his total fusion with the Universal Spirit where all egos melt in One, Absolute, Ineffable and rationally incomprehensible. For those who are working for such an emancipation the present civilisation is but a series of traps and snares. Especially when one considers the absolutely

irresponsible mentality beind its rush for wealth and power, let alone the fiendish weapons it has created for wholesale destruction. One shudders to think of the day of the final settlement of accounts."(12)

Science, Naimy says, has spared no effort in recent times to unveil the truth of what is generally called "matter". As to what is called "spirit", Science has held back, for the "spirit" does not lend itself to experiments. Scientists who are not swayed by the successes of Science do not hesitate to admit their inability to deny the existence of the Spirit. As to those for whom the success of Science has gone to their heads, they have no hesitation in denying the existence of the Spirit and all the unseen power that is related to it. It is from here, Naimy concludes, that the conflict between Science and Religion started. Science, Naimy goes on to say, believes only in what it can see. Intuition, inner contemplation or inspiration are disregarded by it. This is the case, when in fact all these means of knowledge played an important part in the development of modern science. More than one discovery, invention or new trend in Science was the result of an intuition, a dream, or an inspiration. . . But Science refuses to admit anything of this nature, lest it should be interpreted as a deviation from what is called the Scientific Method, which is based first and foremost upon experiment.(13)

Mikhail Naimy maintains that the principal difference between the East and the West lies in one fundamental point: this is that the East surrenders to a power which it accepts to be greater than itself, and so does not fight it, while the West is proud of its own power, with which it tries to fight all other powers. He also seems to think that the East looks upon the world as perfect, as being created by God who is Perfect, while the West sees defects in the world, which it intends to put right. He goes on to say that the East says with Muhammad "Say: nothing will befall us except what God has destined for us" "qul lan yuṣībanā illā mā kataba 'llāhu lanā", and with Christ, "Thy Will be done!" "la-takuna mashī'atuka". It blesses Buddha's victory against Man's desires, and Laotse's sublimation which raises him above the vanities of the world to unite in spirit with the Tao, while the West says "My will be done"; and whenever

it fails to fulfil its will, it never ceases to try again, and to cherish the hope of winning in the end. The East says, "There is no Conqueror but God," "wa-lā ghāliba illā 'llāh" while the West says, "I am the sole Conqueror." This presumption and arrogance of the West concerning its own power, and the surrender of the East to a power that is greater than itself, is the dividing line between the two worlds. Naimy states that in the East's acknowledgement of its impotence in the face of the power of death and life lies its own triumph, while the West's arrogance towards these powers is evidence of its eventual defeat and failure. "The West's attempt to 'reform' humanity and to understand its secrets are like the attempts of a fish in an ocean which tries to 'improve' its conditions and to know its contents." Naimy maintains that the West is trying now, by means of its microscopes and telescopes, to comprehend what the East had comprehended through its belief and spiritual experiments. It is significant, he says, that the more the West delves into its methods of knowledge, the more it tends to fall back on the East, "wiping off the dust of generations that accumulated on its teachings, bringing them back to life, and introducing them to its people as if they were new facts. For now we see the West trying to explore the great philosophies of China, India, the Jews, the Arabs, and the Persians, in an attempt to find therein the keys that would unlock for it the secrets of this universe, those secrets which have not yielded to its logical proofs and teaching."(14) Naimy cites Sir William Crookes, Oliver Lodge and Conan Doyle, the scientists who believed that Man has a spirit, and that, although his body perishes, his spirit is immortal. "If the West has come to know this truth "by proof", the East has known it since time immemorial. It has built on it and on other revealed facts the foundations of its life". He goes on to say that he believes these to be "revealed facts" for, in his view, no other facts exist. Man, alone, is unable, he says, to comprehend the secret of existence. These facts are the heritage of the East, and what are now called "scientific facts", according to which we now adapt our lives, are no more than conjectures. For facts or truths do not change with time and place, and the best we can say of the "scientific facts" of the West is that they are "reasonable suppositions" applicable for a

limited time, and that they hold their own until we come to know better facts which are more acceptable to our comprehension. It should be pointed out here that the East of which Naimy thinks is not the communist East, nor the East of rising nationalisms which mould themselves on Western lines. To him the East is represented by the various Eastern seers whose vision and imagination grasped the universal truth. It is the East which produced Buddha, Laotse, Christ, Muḥammad, al-Ḥallāj and Ibn ʿArabī. This, Mikhail Naimy believes, is the East which will be able to rescue the world from disaster. The East of our own day should liberate itself from the fetters and chains of dogma, a step which will enable it to learn and to derive strength from its great teachers.

Discussing the subject of Western and Eastern civilisations, it seems that he arrives at the conclusion that the fundamental difference between the two is that Western Civilisation relies mainly on Man's mind or intellect, or what he sometimes calls '"al-baṣar", while the Eastern civilisations rely mainly on Man's insight "al-baṣīrah" or belief. While the East surrenders to a greater power than its own, the West refuses to adopt such an attitude and tries to impose its own will on life. There seems to be no doubt in his mind of this clear distinction which he draws between the East with its "belief" and the West with its "intellect", that the East is the wiser, and that the West is shortsighted as well as arrogant. Moreover, he seems to maintain that, if the West has anything at all of value, then it is something which it has boroowed from the East: "For if you were to strip Western Civilisation of what it had borrowed from the East, you would have no more than a grave painted with gold on the outside, and filled with bones and worms on the inside. If ever you say to the West: "I will now burn all your works except one which you have to choose", what will the West choose? It will undoubtedly choose the Holy Bible. If you do the same with the Muslim World, it will choose the Holy Qur'ān. If the most valuable and most precious work in the eyes of the West is a gift which the East has bestowed on it, how is it then that the East should ever stretch out its hand to beg from the West? and whatever would it beg, except aeroplanes, machines, wires, gunboats, parliaments, museums, nightclubs, opium, diseases and

many other miseries that would never bring it closer to the meaning of life, or ever grant it any spiritual tranquillity, which it might gain through its belief." In another statement he declares that "the East can dispense with adopting even one single thing from Western civilisation, for adoption is no more than imitation. He who imitates others is unfaithful to himself; for by imitation one tends to hide one's own truth, and to assume the truth of others. In every nation, as is the case with every individual, there lies a truth whose value depends on its originality. That is why I cannot see how we can imitate the West in any aspect of life without being treacherous to ourselves or mutilating the truth that lies within us." And, let him who wishes to say 'He is a reactionary who wants to draw us back to the ignorance of faith and its superstitions' do so, for such words will not change my belief that the East is nearer to the truth, through its belief, than the West with all its intellect, sciences and proofs, and that the arrogant West is not happier than the East nor nobler or more honourable. Surely, he who says wholeheartedly "There is none who is victorious other than God" "wa-lā ghāliba illā 'llāh", is wiser, in my view, and more tranquil in spirit, than the one who says "There is none who is victorious except me" "wa-lā ghāliba illā anā." If there is any need for the one to learn from the other, it is the West who needs to learn from the East rather than the reverse."(15)

It is untrue, Naimy says, that the faiths of the East, as some people claim, are its greatest handicaps. Nor is it true that the East is preoccupied with the Hereafter and inattentive to this life, or that its belief in fate has tied its hands, paralysed its thoughts, and spread a thick veil over its eyes. Is it true, he asks, that the East is dead because it believes in the Living God who is Immortal? Definitely not – what the East has done is to set for itself and for the whole world certain aims. These aims aspire to lead Man to perfection, to rid him of the bonds of the flesh, to overcome his bewilderment when he faces pain and death, to enable him to unravel the secrets of the universe, which would set him free to live a life which knows no boundaries or restrictions, wrapped in the peace of knowledge and enlightened by the splendour of the Divine. The opposites in such a life are united, and Time and Space vanish in it. This

aim the East has perceived through the most pure and clear visions of its prophets. That the East has not attained this aim is indisputable; for to maintain that it has is to claim that every man in the East is a prophet, or that every man in the West is an inventor, a claim which is both naive and stupid. What the East has done, is to have burned with zeal through certain phases of its history to achieve that aim, but to have fallen short of it, exhausted and worn out. For it is not sufficient for those who choose to travel this path to believe in their aim, or to bless the names of those who set it. Nor is it sufficient that they should give alms to a beggar, abstain from food for a number of days, or perform certain rituals in temples. To say this, Naimy declares, is not to hold the East in disdain for not being able to achieve the aim in a limited time. The disdainful thing is that the East should give up the hope in despair, turning its face away from the goal, thinking that it is an unattainable illusion, or seek a goal or a path in the ways of the West. Nothing, in Naimy's view, is greater or loftier than the aim which the East has set for humanity: if it is difficult to achieve, he says, it is because perfection is difficult to achieve. If our veiled sight is unable to see the goal, it is because it is visualised through the insight which is pure and penetrating. The West, Naimy maintains, is unable to give humanity such an aim, or any other purpose which could stand against the changes and vicissitudes of time. This is because the West is guided by its physical sight and not by insight. Naimy concludes this argument by saying that the West should use its "sight" "baṣar" to achieve the aims of the East which it perceived through its "insight" "baṣīrah."

If you ask how would it be possible for the West, which neither sees nor believes in the aim of the East, to pave the way for it to achieve its aim, Naimy would answer that the West is doing this unconsciously and unintentionally: this is because the West has confined itself to the study of the perceptible aspects of this universe and the laws that govern it, which has led to its inventions and discoveries. These inventions will reach their limit one day, a matter which will divert the West from the field of things that are perceptible to things that are beyond perception - in other words from following the path of the

"sight" to that of the "insight", from the "limited" to the "unlimited", from the "finite" to the "infinite" - this is the very aim of the East. Do you not see, he asks, how Science, which forms the basis of Western Civilisation, and which claims to confine itself to perceptible matters, starts with things that are imperceptible, moving to things perceptible? Thus, the point, which is nothing, comes to be the measure for all dimensions and the foundation of practical engineering. This is also the case of the figure one, which is pure illusion, yet has become the basis of mathematics, thanks to which skyscrapers, bridges, aeroplanes, and dynamos are constructed. It is undeniable, then, that modern science as propagated by the West has served both the East and the West, for it continues unintentionally to transfer things from the domain of the imperceptible to the realm of the perceptible. As the majority of people do not believe in things like electricity, except when they see it in the form of light in their houses, Science (and the West) came to have a great hold on their minds and lives. It is for this very reason that the East holds the West now in great esteem. Naimy goes on to say that, although the West has produced systems that deprive some people and surfeit others, it will not fail ultimately to create a world where people do not spend most of their time in striving to satisfy their hunger and protect themselves against nature. When men are free from their nightmares of providing their food, clothes, and lodging, they will be able to pursue aims other than the satisfaction of physical hunger, to seek clothing other than to cover the nakedness of their bodies, and to look for an abode that will protect them from the rancour of themselves: this will be no less than the abode of God.

We all know, Naimy says, that the inventions of the West have mde the world smaller, and that even its wars have worked to that end. Thus, the West is working unconsciously towards bringing humanity closer together. This end is implied in what the East had said: "love your neighbour as you love yourself", and: "All people are the children of God." When the science of the West reaches its limit, it will find itself face to face with the thing that makes matter, when it itself is not made of matter - with the Power which the East long ago called God. In other words, the West will move from the tangible to the abstract, and

it is then that the role of the West will come to its end in this phase of the history of humanity, and it is then that the East will be called upon to take the lead. The task of the East then will be, after the West has paved the way for it, to make its aim clear to humanity, so that it may appear with all its splendour, purified of all the stupidities and inane oddities with which ignorance has veiled it. The East will then be able to gather humanity which is lost between its sight and its insight, leading it towards its goal with steps that know no limitation, and a will that never fails. (16) In the tone of a spiritual leader whose words are saturated with an intense and deep feeling that the East will ultimately lead this world to salvation after modern civilisation has led it astray in seeking the materialistic luxuries of life, Naimy concludes an article entitled "The Civilisation of the Mind and the Civilisation of the Vision" by saying:

"I can see the vision of this East appearing anew in this world. He who will carry its torch is a prophet whose legs will have the strength of the world, whose arms will have the might of heaven, whose eyes will glow with the truth, whose tongue will bear the tranquillity of knowledge, and whose heart will be the abode of love. And he shall walk among men in the East and in the West, with his heart held on his palm as food for all those who are hungry. They will eat of it in the West and get poisoned. They will eat of it in the East and they will live. And he shall not be crucified."(17)

Mikhail Naimy seems to think that the course which Western civilisation is taking now is similar to that which Eastern civilisations took in the past. He explains that Eastern civilisations, based mainly on faith, spread to a large part of the world. But, as the faith of the Prophets was inherited by the demagogues, with its light overshadowed by the darkness of superstitions and ignorance so also the science of the scientists of the West is being thrown into the hands of exploiters who use it to satisfy every desire. After reviewing the scientific achievements of the West, he imagines a conversation between the "heart" of humanity and its "mind", where the "heart" says to the

"mind": "Yes, you have done all this for Man, but you have sold yourself to a strange creature which you have created to be your servant and his and, all of a sudden, it has come to be your master and his. How strange that a creature should come to excel its own creator, or a slave to dominate his own master - that creature is none but the Dollar." (18) This one takes to imply that the West has been subjected to a materialistic outlook which "invents for the hungry that which makes him forget his hunger, for the slave that which makes him forget his freedom, for the bored that which amuses him, for the seeker of beauty and perfection that which numbs his conscience, for the seeker of knowledge charms which it calls the theory of evolution and the survival of the fittest, for the man who seeks liberty charms called nationalism, racial-ism, and purity of blood and language, all of which it patches together in a piece of cloth of various colours which it calls a banner. To the poor people it turns and says, "that is the symbol of your freedom and independence, so sacrifice your blood for it - and the poor people believe what they hear, submerging themselves in blood." To the student of Naimy this materialistic outlook, this "mind" of humanity, is obviously associated from his point of view with the West, while the "heart" of humanity, its idealistic and spiritual side is associated with the East.(19) The "heart" is always yearning for "a life whose justice knows no prejudices, whose brotherhood harbours no deceit, whose beauty is untarnished by ugliness, a life whose heart is free from fear, whose body knows no death. It is a being which does not begin here or end there but within whose domain all beginnings and ends vanish, and deep in its depths limits and contradictions are submerged. In its vast expanse all beings meet. No struggle or dispute lies in it - nothing but understanding that is above encounter, and within it there is nothing but love that is not blemished with blood." This "heart" of humanity seems always to be associated in Naimy's mind with the East. In fact he maintains that he "visualises that the reins of humanity will one day be transferred from the hands of the West - which is one of the twins of humanity that is guided by its sight - to the hands of the East which is the other that is guided by its insight. I see the East already pulling together its strength to undertake the responsibilities of leader

-ship that will be handed over to it."

The East is also associated in Naimy's mind with what he calls its vision, for through its vision, the East, Naimy says, was able to see life as one whole indivisible unit, and thus it conceived its beauty as it is perfect, and its perfection, as it is beautiful. It was in Sinai that the East heard the words of that vision addressed to Moses: "I am your God, do not take for yourself a God other than Me." In the Bhagavad Gita the vision of the East reaches its climax in the conversation between Prince Arjuna and Krishna, the incarnation of God, as it sees life having only one Self, where no other self has an entity except as part of that Self, and which no man could reach except by denouncing his individual self - and taking refuge in his comprehensive whole self, which he sees through his vision. The Nirvana, Naimy asserts, reaches the same heights, as do also Christ's teachings about the kingdom of Heaven. Muḥammad's preaching, says Naimy, that "There is no God Except Allah" is another example of the East's penetrating vision, and if you could tell Buddha today that we have invented a machine by which we can reach the peak of Everest, his answer would be, "But I have flown to the zenith of life, to the Nirvana, with wings that are not made of wood or steel, and are moved by nothing except by my vision." If you could say to Christ today that we have discovered some rays with which we could see the sick spot inside the human body, his answer would be "But I can see the sick spot with unseen rays - these are the rays of my vision." Likewise, if you could say to Muḥammad that we are able now to speak in Damascus and be heard in Mecca, he would say "But I can hear, with the ear of my vision, the voice of Gabriel without your machine, and in his voice I hear the voice of God, and in the voice of God that of life."(20) The essence of the message of the East to the world, as seen by Naimy, is that the East urged Man to adopt the course of self-negation, and to break the chains of his limited corporal self in order to unite with the incorporeal greater self. This Man could only achieve through the development of his inner powers. It is this course that the prophet of the East followed to attain communion with God.

This, from Naimy's point of view, is the genius of the East that it came to know the truth about life through its vision.

What, he asks, has Western civilisation been able to achieve except that it has enlarged and expanded our knowledge of perceptible things? If it has been able to increase the average of Man's life by one year, it has simultaneously increased his misery for a larger number of years. If it has made the distances between the nations of the world shorter, it has set the hearts of these nations farther apart. If it has made working hours shorter, it has lengthened the hours of vice and debauchery. It is not surprising, he says, that such a civilisation should encounter political and economic crises everyday, and that it should spill its blood and destroy itself. If the message of the East as seen by Naimy is epitomised by self-negation, he seems to have no doubt that the philosophy of the West is basically founded upon self-assertion. The West, equipped with reason, science and intellect, rejects vision and intuition. Naimy admits that the West has achieved great victories in providing Man with materialistic needs but, on the other hand, he maintains that it has failed to provide Man with spiritual values on which he may found his life, and through which he would be able to define its aims and goals.

In analysing Mikhail Naimy's attitude towards Eastern and Western civilisations, one finds that the mystical element in his thinking, which seems to create a conflict between Naimy the individual and Naimy the member of the human race, leads him to seek an outlet in which he could express his dissatisfaction with the predominant mode of thinking in the West. To say that the student of Naimy would not find anything new in the element of Nature-Mysticism in his writings, is not to underrate the value of his thought: it is simply to state that these thoughts, important as they are, had been previously expressed by writers, sufis, poets and thinkers, both Eastern and Western, who were endowed with similar contemplative inclinations. Evelyn Underhill writes that "Man has an ineradicable impulse to transcendence." (21) The sense that we, human beings, are far from being fully grown, has always haunted Man's mind. "Let every Christian as much as in him lies," Blake says, "engage himself openly and publicly before all the World in some mental pursuit for the Building of Jerusalem." (22) Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī, the great Muslim mystic wrote:

"I sought a soul in the sea
And found a coral there;
Beneath the foam for me
An ocean was all laid bare.
Into my heart's night
Along a narrow way
I groped; and lo! the light,
An infinite land of day." (23)

Thus Man's attempts to attain "knowledge", his groping search for "the light" are not a monopoly of the East, nor are they confined to the West. But, as Western civilisation, based principally on Greek logic and reasoning, has achieved its most dazzling successes in the field of Science, there has been a tendency - in the West as well as in the East - to look more and more upon Western Science as the only means of attaining knowledge. This is a fallacy which one could easily disprove by pointing out that the West has had its long heritage in the domain of the spirit well before the so-called "materialism" label was attached to it: thus, just as the East produced Laotse, Buddha, Rūmī, Ghazālī (24), and Ibn ʿArabī, the West similarly produced St. Augustine, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Eckhart, Ruysbroeck, to mention but a few names in both parts of the world. Hence Mikhail Naimy's claim that the West has always given priority to the "intellect" and neglected the "heart" is not convincing. This is all the more surprising coming from a writer as brilliant as Naimy, who is closely acquainted with the history of the West and its culture in every field. Moreover, Naimy's claim that the East has always surrendered to a power greater than itself is equally unconvincing: did Huleku, Jenghiz Khan, Tamerlane "succumb" to a power greater than themselves? Surely these Eastern historical personalities with all the atrocities they committed against humanity, should not be swept into oblivion when one discusses the question of Eastern civilisation, remembering only the glorious side of it. For it is far from being objective in this respect if one tends to remember only the greatness of Moses, Christ and Muhammad especially when this tendency towards selectivity comes from such an important thinker as Mikhail Naimy. There is, Naimy maintains,

a lack of balance in Western civilisation between the "mind" and the "heart", which has brought about an overwhelming tide of selfishness, rancour, hatred, greed and deceitfulness. These characteristics, he says, will deal the death blow to that civilisation. Here again, one finds a tendency towards discursive reasoning: for these traits have been part of Man's nature since time immemorial; whether they were the factors that destroyed other civilisations is by no means certain. In fact, historians (starting with Ibn Khaldun, including Gibbon, down to Arnold Toynbee) differ as to the causes beind the rise and decline of civilisations. Naimy also maintains that Science is incapable of comprehending the Eternal Fact about life, foregetting that Science does not seek this kind of knowledge. In fact twentieth-century scientists recognize that their domain is relatively limited. Thus it would be too much to ask Science and scientists to provide us with a kind of knowledge which they never claim to seek in the first place. Moreover, it seems futile to compare what Naimy calls the "insight" of the East (by which he presumably means Eastern Mysticism) with Western Science, as mysticism, according to the Indian philospher Radhakrishnan, is "Integrated thought" in the sense that it brings things together in a new pattern, while science analyses things, or in other words, breaks things into parts. To ask the one to perform the task of the other is like asking a musician to perform the task of an engineer, and to blame him if he fails to do so.

How, then is one to explain Naimy's denunciation of Western civilisation? Is not Naimy's own mind Western to a great extent? Naimy would certainly not have been the great thinker, writer, and critic we know had he not delved deep into the treasures of Western culture in more than one field. There is hardly one work of his in which he does not express his admiration for a Western thinker, writer, poet, mystic, or critic. Are these not the products of Western civilisation? How is it that a civilisation could be all evil, as Naimy implicitly rather than explicitly maintains, when it has been capable of producing such admirable figures in the field of knowledge, whom he himself is the first to admire? In one brief sentence Naimy admits that he is not unaware that his "violent rebellion against Western civilisation

aimed only at dispelling an agony." What was this "agony" that he wanted to dispel through this violent attack? It may be that it was no more than the conflict between Naimy the idealist (basically Christian) and Naimy the man who was constantly forced to live in the world of others, in which there was so much with which he disagreed and disliked. In an article entitled "Sannin and the Dollar"(25), Naimy draws a sharp and impressive contrast between peace in Sannin and the turmoil of life in New York but are we right in taking Sannin - which is undeniably peaceful - to represent the East, and New York to represent the West? Would it not be possible to describe life in Beirut - which is certainly not wholly spiritualistic in character - as the epitome of materialism, and to withdraw after that to a quiet village in the West to draw a picture of the peace in which it is shrouded? If we may do so, and there is no reason why we should not, we could easily claim, following Naimy's example, that the East is the symbol of greed, and the West is the epitome of peace. . . thus altogether reversing the picture which Naimy presents to us.

One also wonders how is it that Naimy, who since his days in Poltava felt very strongly that Western civilisation was driving Man away from the right path, should think that his own contact with the West and that of his other Arab friends abroad was bound to bring back to life all the latent powers that lay under the ashes of ignorance and the authority of the past. If the West was leading Man away from the right path, how is it, then, that contact with its civilisation should be of use to us? Thus, in fact, is only one example out of many which could be given in which he seems to admit the advantages of our contact with the West, while in the same breath deploring Western civilisation. How is it possible for us to change our concepts of literature (which presumably means adopting Western concepts according to Naimy) and to say at the same time that "the East could do without adopting a single word from Western civilisation, for adoption is no more than imitation." If we are to accept Naimy's views on what our attitude should be towards Western civilisation, we should accept the principle of imposing on our selves a policy of cultural isolation, which is certainly not to our advantage, whatever the shortcomings of that civilisation : the fact that there are evil aspects of this civilisation is not

admonishes his readers, "that Molière is not a product of learning dictionaries by heart, or scanning poetry and mastering its rhymes. A Molière is not restricted by the ṭawīl, the wāfir, the rajaz, and the ramal metres of poetry,nor is he restricted by superstitions, trivialities, and rules. He is a spring that gushes out of Nature's bosom . . . How I wish we had a Molière of our own!"(10)

In the same article, Naimy's anger and agitation against the stagnation of life in the Arab World reaches its climax when he says, "I have come to penetrate into your hearts of hearts, wherein I want to kindle a flame like the one I hold in the depth of my own heart! Indeed, I have come to transfuse in your life a germ that will wage in it an eternal war and continuous struggle," and he goes on to say, "For life means the discovery of everything that is new, experiencing what is unknown, and venturing into the heart of anything that might lead you to know the truth of things. Indeed, life is nothing but movement and renovation!"(11)

In this article, which Naimy gives the significant title of al-Ḥubāḥib (12), his rebellion against the literary and social life of the Arabs knows no bounds. It is a life that is "barren, hard and unyielding", which he goes on to compare with its counterpart in the West, where literature is flourishing and people are "in constant movement; destroying and building, deposing and installing, searching and excavating, wandering and discovering, and in general spending more time working than praying. As for us, there is no need to work, for through prayers we achieve everything." Who, amongst our great writers of the past, Naimy asks in the same article, would be placed on the same footing with the great writers of the West? In fact, he goes on to say that the insignificant in what they wrote out-weighs the significant. As for those towering literary figures in the West, they are, Naimy says, "the wings which lift humanity high to the realms of beauty, perfection and love." He attacks those who boast by saying "Our land is the cradle of inspiration and humanity, and the homeland of prophets . . . " maintaining that we must admit out poverty, and that the writers and poets we have are "no floodlights but fireflies." Our whole life, he says, is based on void compliments, and so is what our writers

vary as to the extent of the strength with which we feel them, but they do not vary as far as their essence is concerned. The fact that Naimy takes Shakespeare to be the best example for the role of a man of letters, shows both the extent to which he is influenced by Anglo-Saxon literature and his insistence on sincerity on the part of the writer, in the sense that his aim should be (like Shakespeare's) to explore the depths of the human soul, and to express this exploration in rhetorical language. Thus to seek the knowledge of truth is a fundamental prerequisite for an adib. On this point Naimy's view stands in sharp contrast with the view of another towering figure in modern Arabic literature: Ṭaha Ḥusain writes on this subject, saying "When a poet satirises, he is not to be required to tell the truth; he is required only to be effective in hurting the one he satirises, to excel in defaming and debasing him. As to whether he is truthful or untruthful, as to whether he satisfies morality or is at variance with its commandments and its laws, that is a matter which does not concern Art in any way."(14) One might venture to say that Ṭaha Ḥusain's conception of literature, according to this definition, is romantic, in that it assesses the literary merits of a work of literature or a qaṣīdah by its ability to move and stir the reader, while Naimy's view which requires that the adib should seek the truth "about ourselves and the truth about the world around us" makes of the adib partly a thinker. In an article in al-Ghirbāl in which he discusses the role of the adib he says, "If ever I regret something it is that a large number of men of letters take literature for a profession and nothing more. To them, its aim is to amuse the reader and to divert his attention from thinking of himself. They also aim at achieving fame and wealth, or at showing their ability by constructing a skilful phrase, an impressive qasidah or a popular novel. Literature, to those writers, is no more than an exhibition, where the rules of the language and vocabulary are displayed, a field where memories compete with each other, when it should be a field of "birth and worship." The man of letters, in my view, should be "born" anew in what he writes and, every time he is "born" anew in what he writes, he should perform an act of worship in which he glorifies sacred Life, which leads him from the slumber of ignorance to the awakening of knowledge, from

the darkness of slavery to the light of freedom. If this act of "birth and worship" is fulfilled in what the writer writes, it makes no difference, in my view, whether he devotes his literature to defending the rights of the starving and the oppressed, or whether he turns his attention to other aspects of human life. The important thing is that his words should glow with the warmth of a man who is full of confidence and who is sure of the truth of what he is saying, so that the words may glow in the hearts and thoughts of his readers. It is important, too, that he should not be intolerant towards other writers who devote themselves to the aim of enlightening the heart, the thought, the conscience and the will of Man, so that he may see his aim, and follow the right path to it." (15)

In another article in which Naimy discusses the aim of literature, which, according to him, should express the feelings of Man, his needs and his condition, he strongly warns that literature should not be "directed" or restricted to achieving this or that particular aim. The limits of literature, he maintains, are the limits of human energy in its desire to be infinitely unbound. The importance of any need or condition of Man depends on the extent to which that need or condition enables him to achieve the aim of his existence. The need for food, for instance, has no value in itself; it becomes valuable to the extent that it helps Man to satisfy his hunger for things that are infinitely more valuable and lasting than food: this is Man's hunger, Naimy says, for justice, goodness, beauty, love, knowledge and freedom. Had it not been for these, human life would have had no value, meaning or aim. This conception of literature and its aim has always been, since the beginning of the modern Arab Renaissance, "'aṣr al-nahḍah", a controversial question among Arab writers. It might be of interest in this respect to compare Naimy's views on the subject with his emphasis on the important part that literature plays in unveiling the truth of Man to himself, which could be ascribed to his meditative and religious nature, with the view of Salāma Mūsā, a contemporary of Naimy, and a non-religious thinker (born a Copt) who, after spending some time in England, became a socialist, a member of the Fabian Society, and was called in the Arab World "The Shavian" as he was a great admirer of Shaw. Mūsā's conception of

the role of literature was that it should aim at "the education and guidance of the people, the unveiling of the truths of the Universe."(16)

It is probable that Mūsā meant by "the education of the people" the "masses" as distinct from "Man", and the "truths of the Universe" were most likely meant to refer to the "scientific" truths which have no bearing on the "truths" of Man's environment which Naimy speaks of.

In the age of decline, Arabic, like Arab society, stagnated: writers succumbed to the rules of the language and were governed by them. "Thus the writer himself came to be the instrument in the hands of the language, adapting himself to it without adapting it himself. He came to be servile to the language, while the language came to be his master." This is another theme with which Naimy dealt extensively early in his career as a critic. Here, he vehemently attacked stagnation in the language, and those who held the view that the old should be kept untouched: "ilqa' al-qadim 'ala qidamihi." To him, this view was absurd, for he maintained that language was something that developed and changed: "The language with which we understand each other today in our periodicals and papers and which we use in our speeches, is different from the language of Mudar, Ḥimyar, Tamīm, and Quraish."(17) There is nothing new in this, he goes on to say, for the process of change and development has been influencing our language all through the ages. Taking al-Mutanabbī as an example for the development of Arabic, he says: "Had he (al-Mutanabbī) written his poems in the same language as that which the writers of al-Muʿallaqāt used, he would hardly have been noticed in our language, rather than being a living force. This applies to Abū al-ʿAlāʾ too, who, had he written "Ghairu mujdin" in the same language in which he wrote his Epistles, we would not have had that great poem.(18) If the Andalusian poets had tried to compete with the pre-Islamic and "mukhadramūn" poets, we would not have had the muwashshaḥāt (19) of Andalusia." In this article, Naimy comes to the conclusion that "language is one aspect of life, and it is not to be subjected to anything except the rules of life: thus it chooses what is most suitable, and out of that it preserves the most suitable for every occasion."(20) He goes on to attack the

writers who indulge in what he calls "the war of expressions", in which some writers say that a certain expression is not permissible, quoting al-Thaʿālibī (21), while others maintain that the same expression is permissible, invoking the support of al-Zamakhsharī.(22) Naimy was one of the first Arab critics in modern times who propagated the idea that our concern for our language should not lead us to forget that it is - like any other language - a means by which we express our emotions and our thoughts. Thoughts and feelings, he wrote, have their own independent entity separate from that of language: they both come first, and language follows. "All the dictionaries and works on grammar in the world, have never been able to start a revolution nor to make a nation, but thought and feelings renew the world every day."(23)

If these ideas sound self-evident to any educated Arab today, the case was not so in 1923 when Mikhail Naimy compiled his articles of criticism in al-Ghirbāl. Had Naimy not lived in Russia and the United States, where he became familiar with the cultures of these lands, he probably would have been one of those writers who took part in quixotic battles of expressions.

Thus one can say that, together with al-ʿAqqād, al-Māzinī, and Ṭaha Ḥusain, Naimy was a pioneer in giving a new meaning to criticism and literature in the Arab world in modern times. In fact, al-ʿAqqād was one of the first prominent Arab writers to express his admiration for Naimy's thoughts on the purpose of criticism. Al-ʿAqqād agrees with Naimy on the question of the meaning of literature, in his insistence on truthfulness and naturalness which he set as his main criteria by which to assess the value of a literary work.(24) The views of al-Māzinī in this respect are similar to those of Naimy: "They (the old school) say that the new school destroys and does not build, as though it is possible to build without first removing the debris and preparing the ground."(25) As to the question of freeing oneself from subservience to the word rather than adapting it to the writer's needs, al-Māzinī propagated revolutiionary views, very similar to those of Naimy: "We have inherited the Arabic language from the Arabs, and, as heirs, we have the right to use our heritage as we choose, and not follow the example of the Arabs in everything."(26)

The importance of the writer in society is emphasised in one of Naimy's articles compiled in al-Ghirbāl, in which he asks his reader, "Do you know what is the furnace of the West? It is these flames that pour out of the mouths of its speakers, burning the dry stalks and preparing the soil for a good new plant. Do you know what are the hammers of the West? They are those pens, which, if aimed at the Wall of Babel, would have razed it to its foundations. Do you know who, in the West, toils in burnishing minds and protecting them from rust? They are the writers, whom not even the graves could hide, nor the waves of oceans overwhelm. Have you then a furnace in whose fire we can forge our minds? Have you any hammers? Have you any tools for burnishing minds? In other words: have you any writers?"(27) Like al-Māzinī, he considered that imitating the medieval writers would deal a death blow to modern Arabic literature, for he wanted the writer to deal with the questions and needs of his own day, and these, he maintained, could never be the same as those of the past. Moreover, Naimy was one of the first Arab writers to raise the questions of "bringing classical and colloquial Arabic closer to each other," "raising the literary standards of our readers", "the encouragement of the art of acting among the Syrians", "the reinforcement of the art of writing and raising it to a standard which only those who are adequately qualified should be allowed to practise", "the spreading of literary principles and the translation of the best literary works from European languages into Arabic."(28) These views, one has to bear in mind, were expressed in 1920, at a time when Arabic literature was in the early stages of taking a new turn in its history. MMikhail Naimy was one of the pioneers who precipitated this trend of thought in the literary field; in his first article which appeared in al-Funūn he attacked vehemently what he called "the literature of compliments, occasions, and acrobatics, the literature of superficialities which has no food for the mind or the heart, or any connection with the life we lead everday."(29) Half a century later, he wrote that he had wished then that the pen would change in his hand into a volcano, or that the words would pour out of it like flames that would burn and sweep away all that was outdated and outmoded in our literature, so that there would arise a new generation of writers who would set fresh

standards in which sincerity, beauty and all other lofty human values would be given their due place. These were the days when he felt that "the disease with which our language was afflicted for several centuries, was a kind of paralysis which deprived it of forces of life, and made of it, after its past glory, a corpse in which the dim-witted, the "versifiers", and imitators dipped their pens."(30)

The question of the colloquial and how far we should use it in our written Arabic played an important part in Naimy's literary thought. In the preface to his play al-Ābāʾ wa'l-Banūn, he wrote "I thought of the question of the colloquial for a long time, and tried more than once to use the classical (presumably when something is said by an uneducated character in the play), but every time I tried to do so, I felt like a young boy who was forced to take bitter medicine. The pen would then cease to flow refusing to make "Umm Ilyas" (an illiterate woman in the play) say:

"laitanī aʿrafu kaifa yatasannā li-hādhā 'l-maʿūni an
yadkhula ʿaqla "zainah" fa-yuqallibu afkārahā baṭnan
l i-ẓahr

instead of saying:

lawo barif bas halla'in - hal ibn siteen bartusheh
kaif dakhal bi'aill-ha wa alabha khalfani qudamani

It sounded unnatural to him that an illiterate woman like Umm Ilyās should speak classical Arabic. Undoubtedly, the reader would not believe that a person like her would use a phrase like "Kaif yatasannā"; in fact it would have sounded ridiculous to put such a phrase in Umm Ilyās' mouth. Naimy came to the conclusion that "of all literary forms, drama is the one that cannot dispense with the colloquial language, but this raises the problem that, if we follow the rule, we should have to write all our plays in colloquial, as there is none amongst us who speaks pre-Islamic or early Islamic Arabic. And that means the dying-out of classical Arabic - a national calamity which we are far from desiring to bring about. What then is the way out? I have tried in vain to find a solution for this problem. It needs more

than one mind for its solution. All I could do, after much reflection, was to make the educated characters in my play speak literary Arabic, and the uneducated speak colloquial. But I sincerely admit that this does not solve the fundamental problem."(31) At least this method has the advantage of convincing the reader that what he reads is not affected. In fact a number of Egyptian novelists and playwrights seem since then to have adopted Naimy's method, using colloquial words and phrases uttered by the uneducated in their novels and plays, trying to keep this to the minimum so as not to dominate the whole structure of the play or the novel. As the educated Arab reader is always fairly familiar with the different Arabic colloquial dialects, there is no danger that he might not comprehend the sense of what is being said by a Lebanese mountain villager or a simple fellah in Upper Egypt. Thus Naimy's solution would appear to be a sensible and acceptable one. The fact that he does not seem to like it is perhaps due to the feeling prevalent among educated Arabs that the usage of colloquial, especially in the written form, should not be encouraged, as this might lead to its development into a separate "language" breaking away from the classical, which, being the language of the Qur'ān, has a numinous ring to it with which they are extremely reluctant to part.

Another aspect of Mikhail Naimy's thought in the field of literature is his attempt to emphasise the importance of drama, and to persuade the Arabs to change their outlook towards the theatre. On this question he wrote, "We still consider the actor as no more than an acrobat, the actress as a prostitute, the theatre as a café, and acting as nothing more than a means of amusing ourselves and spending our time. Our nation has not yet come to appreciate the importance of the art of acting, as it has not yet seen its own life being reflected on the stage. The writers and not the nation are to blame for this, for most of what we have introduced to the nation in this respect is no more than a few translated plays, most of which have no literary merit, all of which are strange to our people, far from its own taste, and extremely difficult to comprehend. I have no doubt that, sooner or later, we shall see a national theatre in which the different aspects of our national life are reflected. To

achieve this, our writers should, in the first place, turn their eyes to the sort of life that is going on around them: I mean by this our life with all that is good and bad in it, its joys and sorrows, beauty and ugliness, and find therein material for their pens - for undoubtedly it is rich in material if they could only know how to look for it."(32) Naimy wrote these words half a century ago, and one can see now that a great change did take place in the Arab World with respect to the theatre, and in its view of the art of acting and the actor. In this respect, as in many others, Naimy's views were of tremendous importance in achieving this change of outlook. They also comply with a fundamental belief to which Naimy has always adhered in his views on literature in its various forms: that it should derive its material from life, and that the power that literature possesses is based on the fact that it always "explores the depths of the human soul, tracing its ways, and following its tracks."(33) Mikhail Naimy never tires of emphasising that literature, and the man of letters, should search "in the realm of Man's soul and not in dictionaries." "It is high time", he goes on to say in the same article, "that we should give some attention to that animal made out of a mineral"(34), who was, and still is, the secret of secrets, so that we may find in him something more worthwhile than studying the head of the fish in the saying: "akultu 'l-samakata ḥattā ra'sihā" (I ate the fish including its head).(35) On the same theme, Naimy writes in another article, "In Arabic literature today, there are two conflicting ideas: on the one hand we have the idea that the aim of literature is confined to language, and on the other the idea that language serves the purpose of literature. The supporters of the former idea limit the realm of literature to its being a linguistic exhibition in which they can display to the reader all that they have learnt of the rules and grammar of the language, its rhetoric and prosody, what is allowed and what is not, its antonyms and synonyms, and its examples and proverbs. The poet amongst the adherents to this school is he who is able to write a poem without breaking any Taf'īl, using a single rhyme. He is a true poet if he uses a vocabulary that is understood only by those who have spent their lives studying the language and nothing else. He is the "prince of poets" if he pays special attention to refining his lines,

arranging his rhymes, and using a large number of similes and paronomasias. The true writer of this school is he whose words, when he is writing on "Jealousy and its Evil in Society", flow from his pen, forming expression, and, out of the expressions, paragraphs and, out of the paragraphs, pages are filled and, out of the pages, volumes are written. All this is impressive and lustrous. Sībāwaih, al-Kisā'ī and Ibn Mālik would certainly find no faults in what the writer has written. Every paragraph in the article is situated where it should be, the transitive verbs are properly used, the intransitive ones used with the proper prepositions which grammarians set for them. On the whole, you would find no flaw in the article, except that you would still ask yourself after reading it: What are the evils of jealousy in society?(36) It is against this school and its concept of literature that Mikhail Naimy waged his relentless war. These writers, according to him, did not care what was being said but how it was said. The first question that they would ask themselves when they assessed a literary work would be : "Is its language sound and impressive?" If so, then they would consider what is written as literature, but if they found a tā' ṭawīlah, where a tā' marbūṭah should have been used, or a hamza written on a "yā" instead of an "alif", then it would be literature. The other idea, supporters maintain that language serves the purpose of literature, and of which Naimy was a pioneer, gives consideration first to what is said, and then to how it is said. This school considers that the function of literature is to display thoughts and feelings. It is an exhibition where sensitive souls pour on to paper their reactions to life, where living hearts express, in prose or verse, the echoes of life within them. Theirs is not an exhibition of grammatical rules or poetic jargon. The idea, according to this school, is more important than the language of the writer. For language, he says in another article, is a symbol whose value lies in the thing that it symbolises. Thus language has, as such, no value in itself. It is the idea, the feeling which the language means to convey, that is important. Of course we should give our language the care that is its due, but that should not lead us to forget the purpose of language. The worst we can do is think that it is perfect, and that none could add anything to its precision. For,

if we adopted such an outlook the result would be that our thoughts would come to be symbols, with our words the thing that is meant to be conveyed. Moreover, if we claim that the Arabic language is perfect as it is today, this would imply that we admit to spiritual bankruptcy; for this would mean that we accept the infallibility of the grammarians who set the rules of our language hundreds of years ago, that they were the gods of rhetoric, and that we, because of our inferior qualities and the barrenness of our thoughts, are unable to add a single letter to, or remove a single letter from, what they set. If we accept such an attitude we have no alternative but to break our pens and to stop writing, and to be satisfied with our language and the rules it has.(37)

If Mikhail Naimy was a staunch opponent of traditionalism in prose writing, he was equally rebellious against the traditional style of poetry-writing prevalent among his contemporaries. The writing of poetry during the age of decline and well into the twentieth century came in fact to be a profession in which the "naẓẓām" or "versifier" followed the set rules of prosody "al-ʿarūḍ", while his subject matter would be mostly either panegyric, in which he would go to the limit in hyperbole, or elegiac poems full of affectations. The fashion was to imitate the classical medieval poets or even the pre-Islamic poets. Even a great poet like Shauqi did not hesitate to imitate the style of the muʿallaqāt, when he would stand by the traces of the encampment shedding his tears. The main principle was to adhere to the rules of prosody, but whether the qaṣīdah represented the genuine feelings of the poet or not was of secondary, or even of no importance. Thus the metre and the rhyme came first in the minds of the poets. It is this concept of poetry that we find Naimy vehemently opposed to: "The ʿarūḍ (prosody) has not only done damage to our poetry" he wrote, "but it has inflicted great harm on our literature in general: for, by giving priority to metre over subject matter, it made of poetry-writing a profession; and, once the rules of it were learnt, any dabbler in literature was able to claim the title of poet."(38) Since the poet has always had a special position amongst the Arabs, a large number of "versifiers" appeared whose only qualification was that they were able to follow the rules of al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad.(39)

To Mikhail Naimy, it was absurd that we still should have poets who would stand shedding tears by the vestiges of the encampment of their tribe, when we had no vestiges or remains.* "Our love for ʿarūḍ (prosody) has reached such a pitch," he wrote, "that we hardly utter anything except verse. Even the grammar of our language came to be taught to our children through verse." In the same article he wrote: "Such was our love for 'arud that verse came to be used in our correspondence, greetings, drinking, eating, christening our children, marrying them, receiving our friends and bidding them farewell, and congratulating them on the birth of a son, that nothing in our life escaped verse, except our true feelings and emotions."

It was this trend in poetry that Mikhail Naimy wanted to end, an aim for which he was accused of being "destructive". He did not deny the accusation, when he wrote in reply:

"It is true that I am "destructive", but I destroy so that I may build: what I destroy is not, as some people seem to think, "old" literature, nor is what I build what they call "new" literature. For beauty and truth - which form the essence of literature - never age or vanish, nor is there a human being who is able to destroy them. What I destroy is everything which, in my view, is devoid of beauty and truth - whether it be old or new. I am a helper to any man who sees his life emanating from the inexhaustible spring of beauty, or the ocean of truth whose shores are unbounded."(40)

In another article in which he expounds his views on the meaning of literature he writes, "Man's remains, engraved on stones, are bound to vanish when the stone decays: but the remains which Man engraves on the soul of his brother Man are everlasting, as his soul is immortal. True literature should thus be an engraving on souls, and not veils for the sight. So seek with me that we should have men of letters who would be messengers among souls, and not weavers of embroidered veils."(41)

It is important that Mikhail Naimy takes Shakespeare (and not al-Mutanabbī, Abū al-ʿAlāʾ or any other famous Arab poet) for

* A traditional motif from pre-Islamic times (ed).

his example of what the poet should be: "Amongst writers and poets who appeared in this world," he wrote in an article, "none has been able to explore the human soul as this English author was able to do. None has been able to clothe this exploration with the eloquence with which Shakespeare expressed himself. None has embellished his eloquence with the beauty with which Shakespeare endowed his own. None enriched his phrases with the melodies with which Shakespeare enriched his own. None has imbued his language with the truths with which this giant infused his plays. That is why Shakespeare remains a Ka'bah to which we go on pilgrimage, and a qiblah towards which we turn our faces."(42) It was Shakespeare the discoverer, the explorer of the human soul, who presented his discoveries in eloquent and moving language whom Naimy admired, and it was that ideal towards which he wanted Arab writers to turn. Thus, by trying to give poetry and literature in general a new meaning in the Arab world, he found himself destroying the old concepts and creating new ones. If we see now that these concepts came to be accepted and taken for granted, the credit is due to Mikhail Naimy and a handful of contemporary writers (43) who expounded similar notions in the field of literature.

Turning towards Mikhail Naimy's own poetry, one should perhaps emphasise that "Poetry is and has always been reckoned by the Arabs as their supreme art; for them it has an intellectual and emotional appeal beyond what is normal in Europe."(44) It may also be true to say that poetry is by its nature more conservative than prose, and thus more difficult to influence through the introduction of new methods. But Naimy's main characteristic as a writer is his rebellious attitude towards traditionalism, which is equally expressed in his prose and verse writing; thus it goes without saying that here we find no trace of panegyric or any other traditional theme, which is an important departure from the traditional tendency of the day. The "sincerity" on which he insisted as one of the fundamental bases for prose writings is abundantly evident in Naimy's poems; for if we survey his poems in Hams al-Jufūn, which is his only Dīwān, we find that there is hardly a poem which does not reflect his individual ideas, feelings, and thoughts. The main characteristics of this poetry are meditative, self-searching, wondering

tendencies which are typical of his general trend of thinking. In his poem entitled Aghmiḍ Jufūnaka Tubṣir, (Close your eyes and see) we find him expressing his belief in the oneness of life and death, an idea which he often expresses in his prose-writing. Here poetry is used, perhaps for the first time in modern Arabic literature, as the vehicle for expressing thoughts and ideas:

Wa-in bulīta bi-dā'in
wa-qīla dā'un 'ayā'
Aghmiḍ jufūnaka tubṣir
fī 'l-dā'i kullu 'l-dawā'
Wa-'indamā 'l-mautu yadnū
wa'l-laḥdu yufgharu fāh
Aghmiḍ jufūnaka tubṣir
fī 'l-laḥdi mahda 'l-hayāh
("When afflicted with a disease
That is said to be grave,
Then close your eyes and you will see
in your disease - your cure.
When death comes nigh and close
And the grave opens wide its mouth
Then close your eyes and see
the grave as the cradle of life.")(45)

That the idea is all-important in Naimy's poetry is not to say that it is conveyed at the expense of the language in which it is presented: for here, too, we have simplicity of vocabulary, richness in music, and a naturalness void of any trace of ostentation to display the poet's ability to play with words, or to show off recherché language.

This tendency towards meditation, this pondering about Man's origin, destiny and fate, is more impressive and has a more profound effect on the reader when presented in verse by a master poet than when discussed in prose. In a poem entitled "Who Are You, My Soul?" "man anti yā 'l-nafsī?", the poet wonders where his self emanates from, a subject which has preoccupied him throughout his life:

In ra'aiti 'l-baḥra yaṭghā 'l-mauju fīhi wa-yathūr,
Au sami'ti 'l-baḥra yabkī 'inda aqdāmi 'l-sukhūr,
Tarqubī 'l-mauja ilā an yaḥbisa 'l-mauju hadīrah
Wa-tunājī 'l-baḥra ḥattā yasma'a 'l-baḥru zafīrah
rāji'an minki ilaihi
hal mina 'l-amwāj ji'ti?
(If you see the sea with waves high and violent
Of if you hear the sea crying at the foot of
the cliffs
Watch the waves until they cease to roar - and talk
to the sea until it hears its sigh
returning from you to it
Did you emanate from the waves?

The poet keeps wondering throughout the poem until, in the last stanza, he ends the poem by saying that his soul is a "melody played by an artist, hidden, unseen" and that it is "the emanation of a god" (46) which will eventually return to God:

Īhi nafsī! Anti laḥnun fīya qad ranna ṣadāh
Waqqa'atki yadu fannānin khafīyin lā arāh.
Anti rīḥun wa-nasīmun, anti maujun, anti baḥr,
Anti barqun anti ra'dun, anti lailun, anti fajr
Anti faiḍun min ilah!
(Oh my soul - you are a tune
Whose echo reverberates within me.
Played by an artist invisible to me,
You are wind, a breeze - you are waves
You are sea.
You are lightning, you are thunder,
You are night, you are dawn
You are an emanation flooding from a God!(47)

Here, we have another departure from the traditional style of writing in which the poet uses one single rhyme throughout the poem, for Naimy in this poem uses one rhyme in each stanza, ending it with one or two lines of different metre and rhyme. This sudden change in metre and rhyme at the end of each stanza gives the poem immense richness in music. It is also a departure

from the traditional style which is characteristic not only of Naimy but of most of the Emigrant Poets" "shuʿarāʾ al-mahjar" to whom Naimy belonged. Nadeem Naimy gives an accurate analysis of Mikhail Naimy's poetry when he writes: "Being as a whole an expression of a soul in intense anguish, Naimy's poetry is soaked throughout with a distilled imperceptible pain that makes it communicate itself directly to the heart, without having first to pay homage, so to speak, to the ear and eye, as was, on the whole, the practice of traditional Arabic poetry. He implements his call in al-Ghirbāl that poetry should not be formally subjugated to the classical prosody of al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad but should, if need be, mould al-Khalīl's prosody to fit its own modern purposes, by a successful attempt at this moulding in his own poetry."(48)

The mystical element in Mikhail Naimy's thinking is also noticeable in his poetry. His isolation from the world of others, and the private world in which he alone lives is reflected in a poem in which he says:

Yā sāqiya 'l-julasi bi'llāhi lā
Taḥfal bi-kāsī baina hādhī 'l-kuʾūs
Atriʿ li-ghairī 'l-kāsi, ammā anā
Fa-aḥsub ka-annī lastu baina 'l-julūs
Wa-aʿbir, wa-daʿni fārigha 'l-kās
(Oh cup-bearer who gives all those
Who sit around wine to drink -
fill for others their glasses.
As for me consider only that I do not
sit with the others.
Just pass by and leave my glass empty.)

This inclination to "stay apart" does not stem from his desire to be a stranger, but is a result of being preoccupied with sipping "another kind of wine", for the poet "brews" it in his own heart:

Lā, lā taqul mā ṭābati 'l-khamru lī
Au annanī mā bainakum ka 'l-gharīb,
Bal inna lī yā ṣāḥibī khamratan
Mā mithlahā yuṭfī bi-ruḥī 'l-lahīb

Aʿṣiruhā min qalbīya 'l-qāsī
(No, do not say that I do not like wine
Or that I am, amongst you, like a stranger
But I have, my friend, a wine which has no equal
in extinguishing the flames of my heart.
For I brew it in my own heart) (49)

While others around him are enchanted by the music of the lute, he is immersed in listening to the "tunes of his inner soul"; thus he addresses the musician asking him to play his lute, and to leave him alone listening to his own tunes:

Lā, lastu bi'l-walhāni yā ṣāḥibi,
Fa 'l-qalbu minī jāmidun ka'l-jalīd.
Lakinnanī musghin li-nafsī, fa-fī
Nafsī autārun wa-fīhā nashīd
Fa-aḍrib, wa-daʿnī bain alḥānī.
(No I am not in love my friend -
for my heart is as solid as ice
But I listen to my soul, for
therein there are strings and songs,
So play your music and leave me alone among
my tunes.)(50)

Mikhail Naimy's belief that God, Man, and Nature are parts of one thing, an idea which is prominent in his prose writings, is also expressed in his poetry. For, in a poem entitled "Supplications", he asks God to enable him to see Him in every manifestation of life:

Fī qurūḥi 'l-burṣi, fī wajhi 'l-salīm
Fī yadi 'l-qātili, fī najʿī 'l-qatīl
Fī sarīrī 'l-ʿursi, fī naʿshi 'l-faṭīm
Fī yadi 'l-muḥsin, fī kaffi 'l-bakhīl
(In the sores of the leper
In the face of the healthy
In the hand of the killer
In the blood of the victim
In the bed of the wedding night

In the grave of the great
In the hand of the benevolent
And in the palm of the miserly.) (51)

His feelings of love for humanity, based on belief, patience and sincerity, are also expressed in the same poem:

wa-ʾjʿal allāhumma qalbī
wāhatan tasqī ʾl-qarīb
wa'l-gharīb
Māʾuhā ʾl-īmāni, ammā ghirsuhā
Faʾl-rajā wa'l-ḥubbu wa'l-ṣabru ʾl-ṭawīl
Jawwuhā ʾl-akhlāṣ, ammā shamsuhā
Fa ʾl-wafā wa'l-ṣidqu wa'l-ḥilmu ʾl-jamīl
(Oh Lord! make of my heart an oasis
that quenches the thirst of the neighbour
and the stranger.
Its water is faith,
and it brings forth hope, love,
and patience.
Its atmosphere is honesty
While its sun is faithfulness,
truth and gracious forgiveness.)

In a poem addressed to M.D.B., Naimy's belief in the transmigration of souls is implied:

Fa-hātī yadan, wa-hāki yadī
ʿalā raghadin, ʿalā nakdi
Wa-qūlī liʾl-ūlā jahilū;
Maʿan kunnā mina ʾl-azali
Maʿan nabqī ilā ʾl-abadi
(So give me your hand
And here is mine
through the easy and the hard times
And tell all who did not know:
Since time immemorial
We have been together
Together we'll be till eternity) (52)

In her commentary on the poetry of the Emigrant Poets, Nādirah Sarrāj wrote, "We may consider that the first principle of al-Rābitah was the rebellion against the traditional themes of poetry followed since the days of Imru' 'l-Qais up to the days of Shauqī." She goes on to say, "It is clear that the Rābitah school was the first in modern Arabic literature whose members were able to produce genuine poetry which sincerely reflected the feelings and thoughts of the poets and the hopes and sorrows which their hearts felt." In the same valuable work on the Emigrant Poets, Dr. Sarrāj writes, "For here we have Mikhail Naimy admitting that modern Arabic literature has adopted a principle from the West, which it came to hold as the cornerstone of its literary revival. The principle is that life and literature are inseparable twins, that literature is as wide as life itself, and that it is as deep as the secrets of life which are reflected in it." (53)

In al-Ghirbāl, Naimy also admits that credit is due to the West for making it clear to us that it is possible to write poetry on themes other than love, eulogy, satire, description, elegy, pride and courage, and that this is the reason why we were enchanted by the "new melodies with which some of our modern poets dared to challenge the sacred confines of our poetry."

Studying Mikhail Naimy's verse, one wonders how far he (and in fact most of the Emigrant Poets) were influenced by the poetry of Western poets like Blake and Emerson. It is almost certain that Gibran admired Blake and read everything he wrote. "What he liked most in him was his rebellious spirit against strict rules and outmoded traditions." (54) Blake's preoccupation with the world of the spirit is strikingly similar to Gibran's preoccupation with the same theme. It may be that this interest in spiritual themes spread to other members of al-Rābitah, amongst whom Naimy was a very prominent figure. Dr. Sarrāj also states that Emerson's school, which proclaimed the doctrine of transcendentalism and that the spiritual aspect of Man's life is the most important, must have influenced the Emigrant poets as they clearly give these themes a prominent place in their poetry. Naimy's preoccupation with the question of Man's soul and its nature as expressed in his poetry, might also be a revival of Avicenna's belief that the soul which lived in the "Lower World"

"Al-ʿālam al-suflā", (the world of matter and "fanā"), came to enter the body. But, since the body is mortal as stated in all holy books, while the spirit is immortal, it was thus bound to desert the body and to ascend again to the world from which it had descended where it would enjoy immortality. This Greek idea, adopted by Avicenna, is expressed in his well-known poem, the opening line of which reads:

> Habaṭat ilaika mina 'l-maḥalli 'l-arfa' warqā'u dhātu
> taʿazzuzin wa-tamannuʿ
> (There came down to you from the exalted heights
> A dove unwilling to bestow her love)

As a short story writer, we also find that Mikhail Naimy often uses the narrative as a means of self-expression. This is clearly illustrated in his short story entitled "The Cuckoo-Clock" (55), which is about Khaṭṭār, a young Lebanese villager, who is about to marry a young girl in the village. Before their marriage, a Lebanese who had emigrated to the States returns to the village, bringing with him a cuckoo-clock which fascinates the villagers and the young girl. The emigrant tells the girl all about the happiness she would have in America if she accepts his offer of marriage. The girl succumbs to the magic of the cuckoo-clock, deserts her young fiancé, and marries the emigrant with whom she goes to the States, the country which produces wonders. Khaṭṭār, the young villager, stays in his village, overwhelmed with hatred for the cuckoo-clock which deprived him of his beloved girl. Soon he is filled with the desire to emigrate to the country of the cuckoo-clock. Who knows, he thinks to himself, there may be more fascinating things in that country than the cuckoo-clock. How happy the people of that country must be, and how unhappy you are in your homeland.

The young man leaves his village and emigrates to the New World. After years of struggle and misery, he manages to accumulate some wealth. The first thing he buys is a cuckoo-clock, which he displays in the parlour of a luxurious house which he now owns. He marries an American girl of Lebanese extraction, but he is unhappy with her as a result of their different approaches to life. His wife deserts him to live with

another man, and he is unhappy and disillusioned. What have I done with my life, Khaṭṭār asks himself: there, in your homeland, you were the master of yourself, your house and your field. Your parents loved you, as did everyone in the village. But now, who are you? A prisoner entangled in the wheels of a huge machine that goes round and round never to stop. God only knows where this machine is heading: if you manage to disentangle yourself from it, you will fall to your destruction. If you cling to it, you will see your soul with your own eyes crushed under its wheels. You wanted to conquer the cuckoo-clock, but it has had the better of you. Later he meets his old fiancée, who has been deserted by her lover, and, like him, finds herself the victim of the cuckoo-clock. Now he thinks again of his homeland, and compares it with the world into which he plunged. "This New World", he says to himself, "is nothing but a huge tower which resembles a chariot built on thousands of wheels that go round feverishly. The chariot slopes down from the heights of a mountain to a precipice that is bottomless. He imagines the chariot crushing him, then he sees millions of those who cling to this huge chariot, quarrelling and biting each other, screaming and wailing, rushing to a destination unknown to them. Thousands of his fellow countrymen are among those who cling to it. Some of them are trodden upon by the racers, others are clinging to the wheels, turning round with the tower, looking as if they are drunk and bewildered. They look back, hoping to detach themselves from the wheels, but are unable to do so. On the top of that tower there is a window out of which a huge mechanical bird appears every now and then. The bird shouts at the millions: "Cuckoo-Cuckoo" and they all prostrate themselves to him whispering to themselves: "the time now is such and such. . ."

Khaṭṭār runs away from America and returns to his homeland. Back again in his village, he assumes the name of Mr. Thompson, and he lives with the villagers as one of them. He endears to them, by word and deed, the goodness of tilling the land; "Hail to him who takes a partner for himself in earning his living. Hail to him who takes the soil for his partner, for he then sleeps soundly."

In Khaṭṭār's personality, we see much of Naimy - his attitude towards the machine age, modern civilisation, and love

of nature. Has he not, like Khaṭṭār, denounced this civilisation with all its complexities and feverish rush, to live quietly in his peaceful village, surrounded by simple folk, unspoilt by the corrupting hand of modern life? As Mikhail Naimy's attitude towards Western civilisation is clearly reflected in "The Cuckoo-Clock", similarly we find that he uses the short story as his means of expressing his philosophical ideas about life in general. The characters of his stories strike the reader as real and ordinary people. But soon Naimy's tendency to move from the natural to the supernatural converts the ordinary Beiruti into a kind of seer, a man of vision, who preaches a certain philosophy. The best example could perhaps be found in his short story entitled "A Nail-Pairing" "Qulāmat ẓufr" (56), where the shop-keeper who specialises in selling and making belts exasperates a customer (presumably the author) by procrastinating and delaying his order for a belt for several hours, as every time he comes for it he is asked to return within a few hours. On coming for the last time for his belt, determined to make a scene if he were to be delayed any longer, the customer finds the shop-keeper, to his astonishment, busy trimming his finger-nails rather than having the belt ready. Here, the shop-keeper, philosophising on his behaviour, lectures his customer on Man's need to trim not only his finger-nails, but the "nails" of his eyes, his mind, his heart and all the "nails" of his desires. Thus Naimy, who preaches that Man's only worthy struggle is that which raises him from the animal to the divine, expounds his belief impressively, using the short story as his means. It should be pointed out, however, that the story preserves its structure without being sacrificed for the sake of the moral: the shop-keeper, with his shop cluttered with rusty hardware, in an environment which is typical Beiruti, is convincingly depicted by the writer. The conversation, moving from the ordinary to the extraordinary, is developed in a natural manner devoid of affectation.

Though Mikhail Naimy lived in the United States for a long time, we find that his heart was always in the Arab World. From the beginning of his career as a writer, his articles in al-Funūn discussed conditions in the motherland. As a short story writer, we find that his first short story, The Barren Woman (57), deals with the man-woman relationship in the Arab World. A

young man who returns home from America gets married. He lives happily with his young wife but, as she does not bear him a child, he neglects her and takes to drinking. The young girl, determined to regain her husband's love, bears him a son, only to commit suicide admitting that the child is not his. The all-important man, with the woman entirely subservient to him is the theme of the story. In his only play, which he entitled Fathers and Sons (Al-Ābā' wa'l-Banūn) (a title which he admits to having borrowed from Turgenev's famous novel), Naimy again deals with the social problems prevalent in the Arab World: the mother who believes that a daughter should get married when she is eighteen, failing which her "reputation" is affected; the daughter who is blindly obedient to her parents; the son who rebels against family traditions, and wants to marry a Protestant girl; the mother whose thinking is entirely sectarian, and who is shocked that her son should marry any but an Orthodox girl. It is significant that the writer, though far from the Lebanon, always had Lebanon in mind. The theme of his writings, the setting of his play, the problems he tackles, all revolve around the Lebanon (and the Arab World in general) and its social structure. This closeness to the Syrian-Lebanese society was kept alive as there is a large community of emigrants from these two countries in the United States. Thus Naimy, though far from Syria and the Lebanon, was able to reflect and criticise in his writings the problems of these two countries through his contact with these communities. Unlike his sojourn in Russia, his stay in the United States brought Naimy, in this respect, closer to the Arab World. It is principally through his short stories that we see him as a critic of the social conditions that prevailed in the Arab World and consequently shaking the reader in the hope of making him reconsider the social values of this society. In this field, he very often uses the story as the vehicle for social criticism as much as he uses it to convey his philosophical ideas about life, thus reflecting his belief that a work of literature is of no merit unless it emanates from life and the environment in which the writer lives, communicating to the reader's mind, as Professor Lascelles Abercrombie put it, his own experience by imaginatively provoking it there.

NOTES

1. Cachia, 1956, 15
2. Al-Ghirbāl, 60
3. Gibb, 1928, 313
4. Kratchkovsky, 1953, 58
5. Ibid., 57
6. Ab'ad min Mūskū wa-min Wāshinṭun, 88
7. Khemiri and Kampffmeyer, 1930, 31 (Translated from Al-Ghirbāl, 127)
8. Al-Ghirbāl, 62 (al-Ḥutai'ah was one of the last poets born in the age of Paganism "al-jāhilīyah".
9. In this early play, Molière is satirising literary snobbery. Briefly, the lines mean "You have made me fall in love with you". It seems that, in quoting these lines of Moliere, Naimy wished to satirize the flowery and recherché language used by contemporary Arab writers.
10. Al-Ghirbāl, 64
11. Ibid., 42
12. Al-Ḥubāḥib are the fireflies. Here Naimy uses the term in a contemptuous tone to describe those who consider themselves to be the "udabā" (writers) of the Arab world, when, in his view, they are no more than "fireflies" compared to the great masters, "the floodlights", of literature in Russia and the West, in 'al-Ghirbāl', 30
13. al-Ghirbāl, 65. The Arabic title of the article is "al-muqāyīs al-adabīya"
14. Cachia, 1956, 132 (Trans. from Ṭaha Ḥusain's Ma' al-Mutanabbī, II, 618
15. Durūb, 53
16. Khemiri and Kampffmeyer, 1930, 33. The personality of Salāma Mūsā and his views stand far apart from Naimy in every respect. It is interesting that these two important writers, who were both deeply influenced by their Western culture and life in the West, returned to propogate diametrically opposite views. Salāma Mūsā, who lived in England at the time when Socialism seemed to be the magic answer to Man's problems, returned to preach socialist ideas and to attack everything that was Eastern, denouncing

it as superstitious and backward.

17. al-Ghirbāl, 93-95
18. Abū al-ʿAlāʾ's poem "Ghairu mujdin" is one of his most famous poems which reflect his pessimistic outlook. See p.8 for this line.
19. The Muwashshaḥ is a form of strophic poetry with a characteristic rhyme pattern which flourished in Spain. It is rich in music and smooth in language. In this respect, the poetry of the emigrant Arab poets in the New World (to which Naimy belonged) has something in common with the Muwashshaḥ.
20. Al-Ghirbāl, 95-96
21. Al-Thaʿālibī, author of the famous Yatīmat al-Dahr was a leading critic who lived in the eleventh century
22. Al-Zamakharī is one of the most famous "mufassirūn" (commentators) on the Qurʾān. He lived in the twelfth century.
23. Al-Ghirbāl, 105
24. See al-ʿAqqād, 1950, 127
25. Māzinī, 1925, 65
26. Khemiri and Kampffmeyer, 1930, 29
27. Al-Ghirbāl, 53
28. Sabʿūn, II, 54-55 (from a letter sent to his friend Nasīb ʿArīḍa, in which he explains his ideas about the foundation of a literary circle in the United States)
29. Sabʿūn, II, 29-30
30. Al-Ābāʾ wa'l-Banūn, 11
31. Khemiri and Kampffmeyer, 1930, 31. Translated from the preface to Al-Ābāʾ wa'l-Banūn
32. Al-Ābāʾ wa'l-Banūn, 15
33. Al-Ghirbāl, 27
34. A reference to Abu al-ʿAlāʾs well known line: wa'l-ladhī ḥārati 'l-barrīyatu fīhi ḥayawānun mustaḥdathun min jamādi, "and he who bewilders all humanity is (no more) than an animal made of mineral"
35. Naimy here is ridiculing grammarians who indulge in explaining the usages of "ḥattā" in Arabic and the effect it has on the word that follows it, thus changing the meaning of the sentence.

36. Al-Ghirbāl, 100
37. Al-Ghirbāl, 104-105
38. Al-Ghirbāl, 118
39. Al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad was the inventor of the Arabic system of metres in poetry and author of the first Arabic Lexicon, Kitāb al-ʿAin
40. Al-Ghirbāl, 52-53, 119-121
41. Zād al-Maʿād, 54
42. Al-Ghirbāl, 72
43. The members of al-Rābitah had the same views on the meaning of literature. But as Naimy, Gibran and ʿArīḍa were the most highly cultured amongst the members of the Rābitah they played a more important role in this respect. The views of Naimy, Gibran and ʿArīḍa had their effect in the Arab world. As these views agreed with those of a number of prominent Egyptian writers (al-ʿAqqād and al-Māzinī in particular), they eventually spread to all the Arab countries
44. Arberry, 1950, Preface
45. Hams al-Jufūn, 9
46. In this poem, Naimy seems to express his belief in the unity of Man and God. It is typical of his attempts to convey his philosophical ideas in poetry
47. Hams al-Jufūn, 21
48. Naimy, 1967, 194
49. Hams al-Jufūn, 28
50. Hams al-Jufūn, 31
51. Ibid., 35-39
52. Ibid., 107
53. Sarrāj, 1957, 119-20
54 Ibid., 122
55. "Sāʿat al-kūkū" in Kān mā Kān, 7-38
56. Abū Baṭṭah, 183-142. It is noteworthy here that a number of Mikhail Naimy's short stories under the title of "Till we Meet" were published by the Indian Institute of World Culture. Another collection was translated in the Soviet Union. This contains stories which depict social injustice. (See Naimy, N. 1967, 252)
57. "al-ʿĀqir" in Kān mā Kān, 52

APPENDIX

Copies of the following poems written in English were kindly provided by Mikhail Naimy.

On a Lonely Bough or The Last Leaf

On a lonely bough
Of a lonely tree
Sits a lonely leaf
Lost in reverie.

While the sky is but one heaving
Grim, unending cloud;
And the wind is deftly weaving
For the earth a shroud.

Neighbours, friends and mates
Left her long ago.
None came back to tell
Of the world below.

Nightingales no longer flutter
Gaily round her bed.
Only ravens come to utter
Dirges o'er her head.

Dry is now the breast
Whence she sucked the sap.
Frozen now and cold
Is her mother's lap.

Yet she neither joys, nor sorrows
But serenely sways,
Knowing that all her tomorrows
Are but yesterdays.

For upon her face,
Shrivelled though and wet,
As within her heart,
All the seasons met.

A solemn Vow
(To One who Worries Overmuch.)

Have peace, O restless, sorrow-laden heart!
I shall not laugh
Until with sorrow I have made you part
As parts the wheat, when winnowed, from the chaff.
Till then I shall not laugh.

O sleepless eyes that weep, yet shed no tears,
I shall not sleep
Until from you I've banished cares and fears
That dimmed your light and taught you how to weep.
Till then I shall not sleep.

O spirit once athrob with song, now mute,
I shall not sing
Until once more I've made you like a lute
Attuned to quiver in Love's hands and ring
Till then I shall not sing.

O God's fair image, lost in Shadowland,
I shall not die
Until I've torn your veils and made you stand
A naked loveliness beneath the sky.
But then - I will not die.

The Endless Race

Say not, my brother, you have lost the race.
Albeit my feet be fleeter than your feet.
Yet in the trackless voids of Time and Space
Your path and mine invariably meet.

Swift is the wind, but so's the languid breeze
That gives birth and sleeps within its breast.
The mother-bird that flutters in the trees
Cannot outfly the fledglings in the nest.

The mountain stream that hurls in fitful leaps
From rock to rock, its waters cool and clear,
Can reach the distant, ever-silent deeps
No quicker than a dewdrop or a tear.

Come, brother, come. The day is not yet done.
The race goes on relentless as before
The time to ask who's lost and who has won
Will be when Time and Distance are no more.

Till then let's drown my laughter in your tears
And cast away their soul-benumbing load
And stride along unmindful of the jeers
Or cheers of those who loiter on the road

Let Them Pass

These minds and hearts on rails and rubber tires
Rolling, forever rolling God knows where;
These hurried feet led on by mad desires
Out of one snare into another snare, -
How can we be their road-fellows, my soul?
They seek too many goals - we seek no goal.
So step aside and let them march and roll.

With all of Time within our NOW,
And all of Space compressed within our HERE;
With Life and Death enthroned upon your brow
In perfect love, what's there to crave or fear!
So when you hear the ever-surging mass
Demand the right-of-way with drums and brass,
Step silently aside - and let them pass.

To The Hudson

You pour yourself forever in the sea,
And lo! the sea re-fills you evermore;
You shun the heights, and yet in ecstasy
The summits stand and watch you from the shore.
While I would make the sea my drinking bowl
And reach the farthest star with one swift bound,
Yet I'm athirst and fettered to the ground
Is my dream-ridden, over-eager soul.

You pay no heed to obstacles, nor lend
An ear to doubt, to passion, or to pride,
But leisurely, unerringly you wend
Your way without a compass, or a guide.
While all the streams that never cease to gush
Out of my heart have yet to find their course:
They flow and overflow; they halt and rush;
They churn about and dissipate their force.

And as the air bears equally the dust
Of star and stone, so do you bear as one
Man's good and ill, his shining gold and rust,
His fickle seasons, tragedies and fun
While I persist in frittering THE ALL
To separate my sorrow from my joy;
And so 'twixt good and evil, like a buoy
Upon the waves, I ever rise and fall.

Yet am I not a derelict so long
As in my depths rings loud your silent song:

"The truly high is ever low.
The truly swift is ever slow.
The highly sensitive is numb.
The highly eloquent is dumb.
The ebb and flow are but one tide.
The guideless has the surest guide.
And he is great who's also small.
And he has all who gives his all."

Golgotha

There is a Golgotha in every heart,
On every Golgotha a cross,
Upon each cross a crucified,
Upon his brow a crown of thorns
And on his lips a word awaiting utterance.

That do I see in my own heart.
What see you, Brother, in your heart?

My cross I chisel of my thirsts unquenched,
My hungers unappeased,
My hopes still-born,
My tongueless sorrow and my doubt-stung faith.

Is not your cross, my Brother, like my cross?

He who is nailed upon my cross is I,
The fool who chases Time with Time,
Who looks for his house while living in his house,
Who created Good and Evil, Life and Death, only to seek escape from Good and Evil, Life and Death.

That is my crucified. Is not my crucified and yours one?

My crown of thorns I plait out of my attachment
to what is attached to nothing,
My hatred of what cannot be loved, therefore, cannot
be hated,
My fear of substances which are without substance,
My coveting shadows.

That is my crown of thorns. Is there not one like
unto it upon your brow?

As to the word upon my lips, its hour is not yet.
But time is endless
And I am patient.

The Mystic Pact
(To Gibran)

I chanced upon my Brother's tryst with Death.
Fast were they locked in each other's embrace,
My Brother saying, "Mother of my breath,
Bid it be still, bid it dissolve in space.
It chokes my nostrils with the heavy smells
Of still-born hopes and putrid days and nights;
And breathless would I dwell upon the heights
And in the depths where breathless Beauty dwells.

"Reach deep, sweet Lover, deep into my breast;
Perchance you'll find a fragment of a heart.
'Tis all I have to offer you; the rest
Is mine no longer: Here and there a part
I laid on canvas, melted into song,
Planted in fields unwedded to the plow,
Forged into tongues for all the mute who long
With tongues their silent longings to endow.

"Now cleanse me, Lover, of the salt and froth
Of earth to sail with you the shoreless sea."
And Death responded to my Brother's plea
And with the kiss of silence sealed the troth.

As I, a witness to the mystic rites,
Stood dazed, enveloped in a thousand nights,
There spoke a voice exceeding soft and kind:
"WHAT IS AHEAD IS ALREADY BEHIND."

Inspired by "Niunia"

Tonight my eyes shall bathe in Beauty's fount.
My tongue and lips shall touch her holy fire.
My spirit shall take pinions and shall mount
Higher than earth-bound spirits dare aspire.

For I shall hide behind your lids when they
Shut out the world to help you see your dream.
And when your eyes shall gleamingly convey
The vision seen, I shall be in that gleam.

I shall be in the floor beneath your feet,
And in the walls about, the ceiling overhead;
And I shall be in every stitch and thread
That hug your breast and hear your brave heart beat.

I shall be cradled in your hands sublime
As they reach up to grasp the hand of God.
And I shall know the glory of a clod
Of earth released from bonds of Space and Time.

And I shall be the hungry flame that leaps
Out of your limbs, from toe to fingertip, -
The flame that feeds upon itself and keeps
Its name unsoiled by any tongue or lip.

And I shall say to those who seek, entranced,
To know your art's the substance and the sum:
"No flesh and bone and blood before you danced.
I know the secret . . . but I'm deaf and dumb."

Then I shall go my solitary way
And bury deep my secret, very deep.
And dance alone, and laugh alone and weep
Until the Night bring forth another Day.

Be Quiet, Reason!

Be quiet, Reason!
Else lay down your crown.
This time my ears are deaf to your commands.
Now that I found the chalice with the wine,
The virgin wine I have for ages sought,
You shall not seal my thirsty lips, nor bind
My hungry hands.
No longer can I fool
A parching heart with all your dewless mist.

If it be sin to call this chalice mine,
Then let me die a sinner.
Yet do I know
That but to touch it is to leap across
Eternities and universes vast;
And to inhale its fragrance is to dwell
In Beauty's heart and burn with Beauty's flame;
And to be drunk with its wine is to merge
Into the Deathless and be all in all.

The Weaver

I am the loom, the weaver and the thread.
I weave myself out of the living dead
Of yesterday, today and days unborn.
And what I weave no hand can e'er unweave, -
Not even mine.

That is my story, Stranger.

Pray with me

That Love may guide your shuttle as he guides
This minute mine, with you upon my loom,
A pattern as mysterious as Fate,
A mystery as infinite as God.

Now go your way, and bid me no farewell.
I bid no one farewell.
I must weave on.

To M.S.M.

You must not break, my heart.
If sorrow seems to fill you to the brim,
Make room for more. For somewhere in the grim
And pathless caves, where fantoms moan and groan,
A sister-heart is bleeding all alone.
Her burdens you must carry as your own;
Else she'll be crushed, and you'll be rent apart.
You must not break, my heart.

You must have faith, my heart.
Remember that the very hand that fills
With sorrow hearts, that very hand distills
From sorrow joy. Whoever can't contain
The one will seek the other but, in vain.
If pain must come, say - "blessed is the pain
Of the acorn that gives the oak a start."
You must have faith, my heart.

You must be calm, my heart.
Let this bewildering kaleidoscope
Of Life at grips with Death, Despair with Hope,
Blur not your vision to the master hand
Behind it. Winds will blow the snow and sand
Off mountain peaks, but mighty mountains stand
Though thunders roar and lightnings stab and dart.
You must be calm, my heart.

Arise, Beloved!

Arise, Beloved! Night upon the hills
Is fast disrobing, and within the folds
Of her dream-garments sleeps the infant dream
That made is older than all yesterdays
And younger than all morrows to be born.

Dawn is re-filling with baptismal light
The holy fonts of Day wherein each Night
Must needs immerse her new-born mysteries.

Beloved, are your arms so steady and so strong
As to receive and hold the babe baptised?
And are your breasts prepared to give it suck?
And know you that the moment it is weaned
It'll steal away and be forever gone?

If not, . . . sleep on until another Dawn.

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